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A G&T PUBLICATION

№ 3

COLLECTORS DREAM

in this issue:

MARVEL CONTINUITY

BRAINSTORMS

MONEY

WARDWORLD

PERTWILLABY PAPERS

(c) 1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

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VOL. 1 NO. 3

FOR COMIC COLLECTORS AROUND THE WORLD

COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE

A G&T PUBLICATION

Well, here we are with the third issue of *Collector's Dream*. We've devoted virtually the entire issue to the Marvel scene, which is often the core of most collections. We are happy to welcome Bennet Marks and Dick O'Malley to *Collector's Dream*. Bennet and Dick are really prolific—particularly Dick, who has sent still more Continuity Conundrums columns for future issues. We hope this pleasant trend continues! And Bennet has a whopper of a column which we hope we'll be able to print one of these days.

Also featured this issue are more Pertwillaby Papers, another Wardworld and another of Joe Krolik's Brainstorms. We've bumped our page count to 40 pages this issue to accommodate all the articles, you'll notice. But don't think we're overflowing with articles, people: we need material all the time. Keep sending us good stuff and we'll print it!

Dealers and subscribers should note that *Collector's Dream* is being printed in the United States now. Those of you who are scared to order dealer lots because of customs hassles need not worry! Also, Phil Seuling, P.O. Box 177, Coney Is. Stn., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11224, carries a generous allotment of *Collector's Dream*; just check off that box on his order form.

We continue to suffer from a lack of *advertising*. If this keeps up, we'll have to think about raising the cover price from 30 cents, a really irksome thought. Ads help fill out a magazine and lend it physical substance; it won't feel so *thin*.

Our ad rates are truly low and those of you who worry that 7" X 10" does not equal 8½" X 11" should remember that we sell *live* area. Any 8½" X 11" ad may be printed without reduction on one of our pages at the 7" X 10" rate.

Somehow we managed to misspell the title of Jim Van Hise's fanzine *Rocket's Blast / Comi Collector* all throughout last issue. At least we were consistent.

One thing we forgot to do last issue was to credit Rob McIntyre with the photographs of the pulp covers in Don Hutchison's article. Consider it done, Rob!

Finally, for those of you old guard Marvelites who might find the characters on our cover a bit unfamiliar, their names are: Ikaris the Eternal, the Human Fly, John Carter of Mars, Nova, Omega, Mister Machine and Starlord. Ken Steacy didn't have room for Ms. Marvel, Spider-Woman, Tarzan or Godzilla. (Sorry, folks.)□

mail

THE VISION'S HANDS

Dear Sirs:

I received my copy of your MARVEL COMICS INDEX Part 3 today, and I must confess that I was overjoyed with the product. The only disappointment was the cover. I am an avid collector of art by Neal Adams, but somehow I felt that he was not himself when he drew your cover. I am refering to the section of it where the Vision is depicted firing some type of rays or bolts from his *hands*. Surely Adams, who drew some of the best issues of *The Avengers* yet published, at least in my opinion, would know better. The only beams which the Vision may utilize come from his *eyes*. I would extremely like you to acquire his talents for some other covers later in this series, but if you do, please inform him to make them technically correct besides artistically stunning. Either Adams or Dave Cockrum would produce an excellent cover for your section concerning Daredevil and the X-Men.

NEIL RENTON, JR., Cleveland OH

(c) 1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Dear George and Tony:

I just received Volume Three of the MARVEL INDEX, and I felt the need to tell you how much I enjoyed it...

...However, the Vision doesn't shoot bolts from his hands...

JAMES J. MURRAY, Lawrence KA

We received a note from Neal Adams which accompanied the artwork for his cover. In part, it read, "...I know that Vizh can't do that with his hands, but I applied for an artistic license." End of problem?

WHAT ABOUT LIZ?

Dear Tony,

Not content to compile and produce the MARVEL INDEX, now you're doing a monthly fanzine! You must have discovered the secret of doing without sleep!

But really, COLLECTOR'S DREAM was a totally unexpected and pleasant surprise. The level of production and layout has me very envious and to have the services of one so talented as Franc Reyes can only make the whole thing look that much better...For a starting-from-scratch first issue, COLLECTOR'S DREAM was very creditable, as is the whole concept behind it. CD can only improve from now on as contributors make themselves known.

Need I say anything about MARVEL INDEX Vol. 3 other than it was up to your usual standard of perfection? You fully deserve all the success you're getting— and the CMN Special Award!

Just re-read the bit in CD No. 1 describing future G&T projects You haven't just discovered how to do without sleep, you must have invented the 72-hour day! What's your secret? However, I'm looking forward to seeing each and every one as and when they appear. Keep happy, enjoy your ulcers, and write when you have time.

RICHARD BURTON, Egham, Surrey, England

You want our trade secret? Here it is: We blow our deadlines! We MURDER them! 72-hour day, hah! Seriously, thanks for the compliments on INDEX No. 3; and wait until you see No. 4. The Steranko cover came in months ago and it is stunning. Finally, INDEX No. 3 is [unfortunately] not perfect; we will publish some corrections in the Author's Note in No. 4, and some more in the Author's Note in No. 5, on which work is in progress.

STILL NO CRITICISM

Dear George and Tony,

You mention in *Collector's Dream* No. 2 that you received nothing but praise. Perhaps it is the initial enthusiasm your audience feels for the magazine, and in time readers will contribute criticism as well. Until that happy day...

I'm a relative newcomer to this madness of comic-collecting and your articles are very useful—operative—in that they are setting standards and guidelines for collectors. Other "opera" on comic books that I have come across have been *content*-oriented and have ignored the mechanics of collecting.

My only criticism at this point is perhaps not valid: it would be great to see more articles in *Collector's Dream* from a variety of people. I see that between issues No. 1 and No. 2 you have expanded your writer count and hope that this "trend" continues. Which depends on money, I guess, which depends on advertising, *ad infinitum*.

One other thing—no dates in this magazine? I don't know if I'm dealing with September 1972 or June 1976. Surely I can't be the only creature who is still caught up in such irrelevant matters as time and dates...

In any event—very highest hopes for continued success! I've also enclosed an ad for the "Shop-By-Mail" section. Hope the check covers it.

Regards,

NANCY GEFFKEN,
88 Bernard Ave. No. 507
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1R7

Your letter allows us to clear up a couple of desiderata that we somehow never found the opportunity to clear up before. We avoided dates, and will continue to do so for the next few issues because we cannot guarantee that the book will follow the schedule that we want. All sorts of trivia contrive mightily to screw us up [Tony and I are the only people who do the production], things like printers failing to print within their promised target dates, artists failing to deliver on time, and so forth. Dependability is getting to be one hard quality to find these days [we ought to know—blush]. No doubt we lose some advertising revenue by operating on a "once in a while, but fairly often" schedule, but there's little we can do about it because so little is under our direct control.

On the other hand, our stable of good writers seems to be increasing slowly but surely. We've got two really terrific articles this issue, and more by different writers still upcoming. This trend is indeed encouraging.

WHAT WE GOOD?

Once again we'd like to order the next issue of CDM...enclosed is an M.O. for $9.95 for 60 issues of No. 3, postpaid.

Your protests of 'We ain't that good!' fall upon deaf ears. Could be true, but CDM still stands out above other so-called 'informative' 'zines and your format and layout are superior.

Can we mention that a 'zine from Edmonton, Alberta known as *Visions* A.K.A. *Antares* (S.F.) or *Quest* (comics) could probably use a free plug in your F.P. section...and not just 'cause I (Lari) have done a cover for *Quest* No. 2, but 'cause Bob Thompson, the publisher, seems a nice guy working hard to put out a thoughtful and intelligent 'zine. To contact him— Paranoid Publishing, P.O. Box 4071, Edmonton, Alberta TGE 4S8.

Many thanx,

LARI & LEA DAVIDSON
The Haunted Bookshop,
4876 Delta St.,
Ladner, B.C. V4K 2T8

P.S. How can we thank you enough for reprinting Don Rosa's great strip? Please keep it up!

We won't be running a free plugs section again for a few issues. Instead, we've run your letter. Warm praise helps us through our months of tribulation.

DREAM SCHEMES

Dear George,

I was rather pleasantly surprised to discover, a couple of weeks ago, the first issue of *Collector's Dream* up at "Comics for Collectors". There's no need for me to say anything about the fine standards of art, writing, or production—obviously, you're doing a tremendous job, and I'm anxious to see what you plan to do with the zine in the future. So...I'm enclosing $4.00 for a 1-year subscription to begin, if at all possible, with issue No. 2.

I'm uneasy about the editorial flavor of the zine which suggests that the most important part—if not the *only* important part—of this hobby is the actual collecting-of-comic-books. The bias is both consciously expressed throughout your first issue, from the very title of the zine and its front cover (suggesting that, as a fan of the comics medium, my ultimate dream is to be deluged with dozens upon dozens of rare and valuable golden age books by Santa and a crew of rather grotesque-looking elves) to the nature of the articles themselves. Certainly, the collecting and the M*O*N*E*Y aspects of this hobby are major ones, and I don't deny that I have a modest amount of interest in these aspects. But for myself, and a core of several hundred fans like myself, they are by no means the single most important part of fandom. It's a fringe interest for me, and nothing more. (As such, I have precious little use for multi-page articles on grading comics, for instance. And I take objection to your judging the size of comics fandom by the number of people who buy the *Price Guide*. Any nurd off the street can buy the book in well-stocked bookstores, and I know any number of hard-core comics fans who won't touch it.) It's a point of view, a tone which underlies almost every part of *Collector's Dream*, and one which you might do well to reassess.

Thus, the only column in *Collector's Dream* so far which holds any *great* interest for me is Murray Ward's "Wardworld." His initial outing with "Earth After Disaster—After Disaster...etc." was a good start, though rather shallow and frustratingly biased toward Marvel—I expect it'll pick up the pace as it develops. Everything else in the issue was largely peripheral to my immediate "fannish" interests or, in the case of the Tim Conrad interview, a wee bit too self-indulgent for my tastes.

I'd like to see *Collector's Dream* take the next step forward. And I get the impression that you might not be entirely adverse to running more generally (for lack of a better word) fannish material. Let me encourage you, then, to do just that. There's no need to fall into the trap of running old, reliable, and generally unimaginative standby features such as comics reviews or con reports; as I said, the direction being taken by "Wardworld" is a good start. If you'll let me know what sort of deadlines you're working with, I'll be happy to rearrange my schedule and work up some experimental articles of the sort *I'd* like to see more of.

JAY L. ZILBER
c / o GLCA Phila. Urban Semester
1227-29 Walnut Street, 4th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

There is no question that the main thrust of our fanzine is in the direction of comic book collecting. There is no fanzine I know of which provides comic collectors with information and opinions of the kind we featured in CD No. 1. I find that comic collectors, both novices and those with considerable experience, are being taken to the cleaners by comic book dealers [not always but frequently] because the collectors are ignorant. I do not believe that people have the right to get rich off the failings of others [though they've been doing it for years—centuries], and will try very hard to correct the situation by showing the collectors just how they are being taken.

I would say that the sales of the Price Guide *are a good indication of the size of comic fandom. For every dedicated fan who avoids the* Guide *like poison, there is probably a "nurd off the street" who pays eight bucks for a book he'll never look at. Offhand, I'd say the numbers balance, and I'd also say that the number of such fans and nurds is an insignificant fraction of the total number of* Guide *purchases.*

Finally, Murray Ward has just sent in no less than FIVE more WARDWORLD columns, each one better than the one before. We're going to use them all!

A FEW MORE PLUGS

Dear George,

As for *Collector's Dream*, it is honestly what comic fandom has needed for a long long time. We need something that will concentrate a little more on the collecting aspect itself. Fanzines are great. I have participated in three that I can think of at the moment—*The Legion Outpost, Superamalgamation* and *Kapow* (Colorado's *fun* fanzine of the RMCCA). However, fanzines are just that—fan magazines. They have their place but a serious collectors' publication like *Collector's Dream* is needed. Oh, by the way, what is *Collector's Delight*?

RICH FOSTER, 6801 Locust St.,
Commerce City, CO 80022

Collector's Delight *will be a kind of companion to* Dream, *once we get together a format and a schedule. Keep watching for more information.*

PULP PRAISE

Dear George Olshevsky:

I've just finished Vol. 1 No. 2 of *Collector's Dream* and just delighted in Don Hutchison's article, *Pulp Villains*. It was super fine, and I felt I must write you how much I truly relished it. (Somehow I'm glad you're all out of Toronto—I'm not there often, but it's one of my favorite cities.) Please pass my compliments to Hutchison. Terrific job!

CHRIS STEINBRUNNER, WOR-TV,
1440 Broadway, New York City 10018

Chris Steinbrunner is the New York regional vice-president of the Mystery Writers of America, Inc., 105 East 19th Street, New York City 10003. Don Hutchison says—Many Thanks!

CONTRA CONRAD

Dear George and Tony:

The Tim Conrad interview was a fascinating bit of insight into the mind of an up and coming young comics artist. I think I speak for many readers when I say it was a delightful and articulate piece of reading. However, I must take Tim to task on two issues presented therein.

First, I feel director Ken Russell was slightly maligned by Tim's comments on the film, *The Devils*. Regardless of one's opinions of Russell's other films, one must acknowledge the artistic success of *The Devils*. But the film cannot be considered a documentary of the events in Loudun in 1634. It must be considered as an adaption of John Whiting's 1961 play and Aldous Huxley's 1957 book. Any significant historical flaws Tim may find should be layed upon Huxley's or Whiting's doorsteps and not upon Russell's. With the exception of some artistic license taken with characterization, Russell followed his sources *very closely*. Word for word in many instances.

Tim says that he has found out that the movie "had nothing to do with the reality of the situation portrayed. Nothing at all. It didn't happen that way."

The incidents at Loudun are still a controversy among religion historians. Less than twenty works of any depth exist on the subject and considerable discrepancies lace these. I don't believe Tim can pretend to know very much about the 'reality of the situation' if the scholars themselves continue to admit to a lack of knowledge in this area.

Joseph Gomez writes in his 1976 biography of Ken Russell:

"Ken Russell's film version is extraordinary in that it employs much of the impressive dialogue from the play in order to adapt Huxley's book to the screen, in a manner allowing for the expression of Russell's own unique vision and methods."

Second, and a little infuriating, frankly, is the drivel about James Joyce and *Finnegan's Wake* on Page 14.

Tim says, "I don't think anybody can 'read' *Finnegan's Wake.*" While it is true that the *Wake* cannot be read in the conventional manner, it nevertheless can be read. I've read it, many of my associates have read it. And two very notable readers of the *Wake*, Eric and Marshall McLuhan have spent considerable portions of their lives studying it. I won't even mention the large number of Joyce scholars and students who have read it. But I am not surprised a young comic book artist like Tim has not read it.

To read the *Wake* you must do some work. You must "meet the author halfway". If you do so, he rewards you by guiding you through his incredible work. The book can be read again and again.

"No one can understand it". Nonsense. What I really object to is Tim's oh-so-knowledgeable comments about a book he hasn't even read. Come on!

"I've read all the books about *Finnegan's Wake*. I have *Finnegan's Wake*." Well, read it Tim! Read it! And save those 'scholarly remarks until then. As for the books about the *Wake*, they are simply two-dimensional analyses of various characters and storylines. Believe me, the original is much better. The best book on *Finnegan's Wake* is *Finnegan's Wake*.

To have listed Joyce as a favourite author and to have neglected reading his most important work and instead read second-hand interpretations of is not only absurd but pretentious.

I think Tim has also misinterpreted the films versions of *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. They were not meant to be definitive cinematic versions of the book, but variations on a theme, if you will. Movies *about* the books, not *of* them. Granted, they do not seem to warrant a great deal of serious attention. But do not mistake the intentions behind the films. In any event, boys, keep up the fine work. You've got a dandy magazine on your hands. I'm happy to have been associated with it.

DEAN MOTTER, 415 Wellesley St. E.,
Toronto, Ont. M4X 1H5

STILL MORE PLUGS

Dear Folks,

Since, you mentioned something about free plugs, I was wondering if you might include an organization I'm involved with in your listings. We call it *Random Fandom* and I am enclosing a flyer which explains the group in detail. If you decide to run it, please have all correspondence sent to me.

JERRY E. DURRWACHTER,
Random Fandom, 11220 Morrow Dr.,
St. Ann, MO 63074

We can't print your letter this issue but we can excerpt the relevant portions which we do herewith:

If you're into comics, science fiction, fantasy, heroic fiction, graphics, rock music, animation or a host of other fun things, you might be interested in our organization.

Random Fandom meets the fourth Sunday of every month from noon to 4:00 in room 126 of the J.C. Penney building on the scenic UMSL campus just off Natural Bridge Road. We feature dealers in comics, posters, portfolios, underground materials, fan miscellany and other hard to obtain items of popular culture.

For scintillating conversation, occasional films, music, a good time or maybe just the latest in comics, join us. Bring a friend.

COLLECTOR'S DREAM *reserves the right to print any letters of comment on its contents, unless the writer specifically requests us not to print. Unsigned letters will be ignored.*

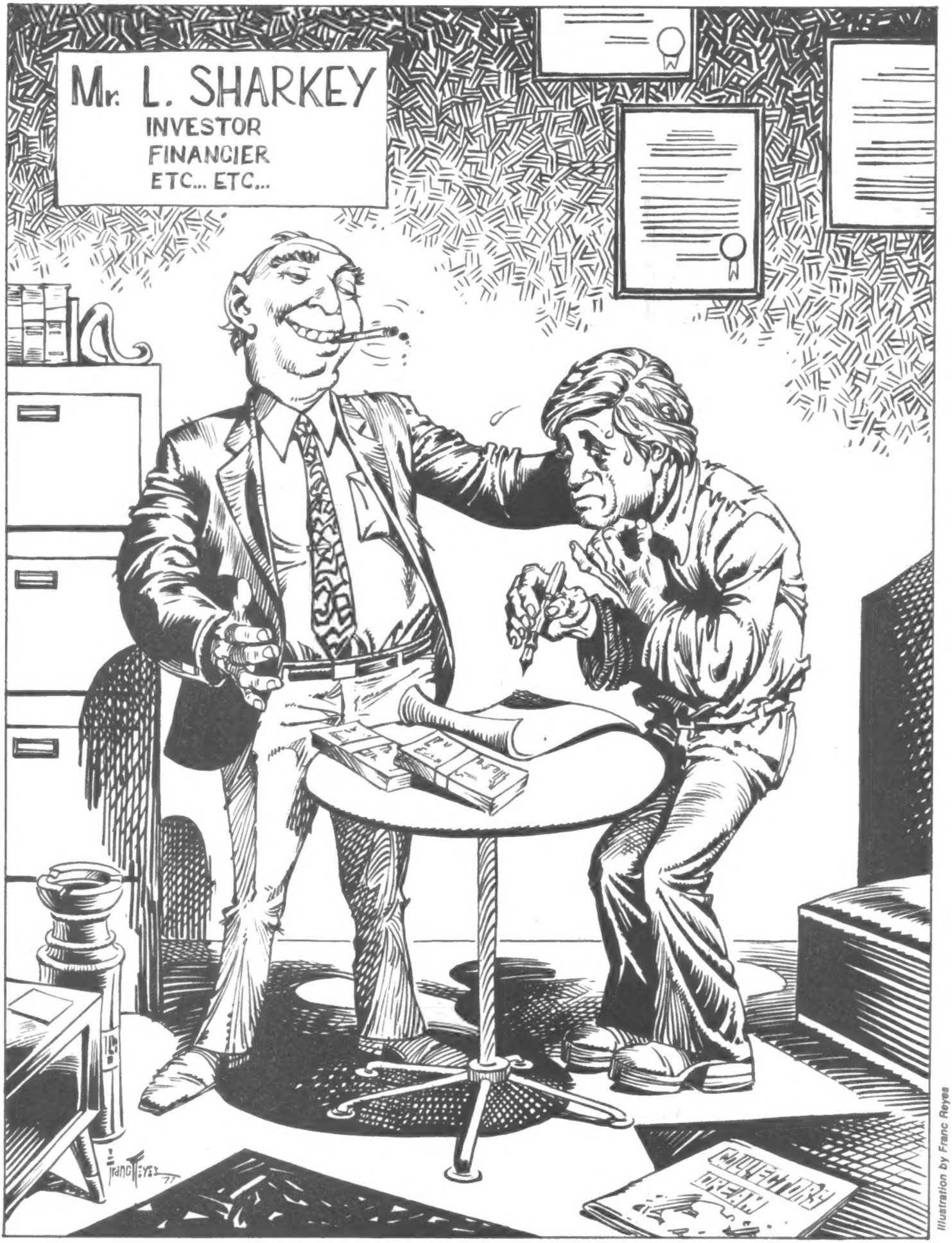

Illustration by Franc Reyes

Financing your comic collection has its pitfalls.

EDITORIAL

FINANCING YOUR COMIC COLLECTION

By George Olshevsky

Here we are again: Money. Tony's been wondering how many more articles on money we have to go through before everybody's totally sick of them. And so have I, actually. It's cathartic in many ways, but I'm beginning to think that triple doses of catharsis might just be *too* much.

So this will be the last "money" editorial for a while. I've held forth on comic book inflation, on dealer ripoffs, on the ignorance of many collectors. I will hold forth in this article on why it might pay to seek financial assistance to fill out your collection. There doesn't seem to be much more to cover, and even if there were, I'd like to take a break.

But first let me explain some of our production hassles.

G&T PROBLEMS

Subscribers to *Collector's Dream* might have noticed (heh heh) that their second issues were very, very late. This is due exclusively to our printer's inexpertise. We sent him our complete subscription list along with our paste-ups, because he told us that he had a computerized subscription handling service which would take care of all our mailing. One month after printing, our Toronto subscribers reported that their issues still hadn't arrived. Now, Tony and I are used to lousy mail service. We live in Canada, home of the second worst postal system in the civilized world, an honor not lightly borne. But one month was pretty long, even considering that they had to come across the border. So I called the printer to find out whether they had been mailed. Yes, he said, they had. Weeks ago.

A week later (5 weeks after publication), we received a note from him, accompanying his bill, which indicated that everybody on the list he had enclosed had been sent the books. That would have been fine, except that the list accompanying his note was but *one* page long. A hasty phone call to the printer confirmed that he had, indeed, *lost* all but one page of subscribers. So much for registered mail.

We sent him another copy of the list immediately. Two weeks later we received another note from him, this one indicating that the list was *far too intricate for him to automate*. He would be unable to mail our subscribers their copies.

So we had all the books shipped to our Buffalo address, from which we mailed them, *nine weeks late*. Good thing we're not tied down to a fixed schedule.

To make amends with our subscribers, all those whose subscriptions began with issue No. 2 will have them extended to issue No. 14, free and clear. Accept our apologies, please. These things happen.

Another problem concerns our long awaited Fantastic Fourth *Marvel Comics Index*. Even though we've paid a goodly sum of money in advance, and even though we gave him all the copy in January, took all the photos in February and pushed Jim Steranko for his cover before March, the printer *still has not* (as of this writing) *completed the book*. He has broken no less than three deadlines which he set himself, and has forced us to spend time in producing the book which he by contract is obliged to spend himself. We have avoided litigation up till now for the simple reason that it seems that nothing, even a court order, will get him to move any faster, and that litigation would provide him with a golden excuse to stop doing *any* work at all. Our prime concern is to produce our books, not get things stuck in legalisms and disputes.

So Part Five will be produced by a different printer, on different equipment. Our former printer might have been excruciatingly slow, but the quality of the final product was quite high. I'm sure you'll agree when you see Part Four at last. Nevertheless, we can't afford to wait half a year between books. What with Part Three being 17 weeks in production after a five month delay in getting the Adams cover, and Part Four now in its 25th week, we have gotten extremely far behind schedule.

Since we're going to a different printer, it is likely that there will be some differences in paper texture and photo quality between Parts Four and its successors. Hopefully, these will be unimportant. The way things have been going recently, we wonder.

Now that we've gotten you readers asking whether or not all printers are morons, let's launch into the topic of this issue's editorial.

THE EDITORIAL AT LAST

Money is a strange and wonderful thing. Nothing promotes garbage like its presence, and nothing inhibits quality like its absence. Any fool with a hundred thousand bucks can put together an absolutely fantastic comic collection, given time; but all the love in the world won't bring in a single book unless you have some terrific friends.

At heart I'm a comic collector and fan. The realities of dealing with money are pretty sordid to me, and, I suspect, to many of our readers as well. I read and enjoy comics as much as anybody, I guess, and I'm trying to spread the word of comics far and wide. As a result of my efforts, I'm happy to say that at least a few people—friends and acquaintances of mine—now see something deeper and more beautiful in the art form than they did before.

On the other hand, I must confess that on occasion I find the monetary aspects of comic collecting interesting and even exhilarating (especially on those occasions when I'm loaded). The complex interplay between dealers and collectors, the sheer craziness of owning books

which sell for thousands of dollars, are a fascinating experience. Haggling with dealers, tossing bids and counter bids back and forth across a tabled filled with comic books is a *ball*.

There are two kinds of people in the comic collecting world: those who like comics more than money, and those who like money more than comics. The former species generally become collectors; the latter become dealers. I'm a collector; let me tell you part of my story.

There was once a time when a comic book collection could be built with practically no money. Back in 1968, I spent about $300 to complete my collection of Marvel superhero comics, and even then people told me I was overpaying. I spent more money for plastic bags, tape and looseleaf binders to house my collection than I spent on the books themselves. My friends could not understand why I spent *so much money* on comic books. Of course *I* knew: I like comics far more than I like money.

(Incidentally, I can't understand why most people spend *so much money* on cars, clothing and booze. *De gustibus non est disputandum.*)

In 1969, when I was a very poor graduate student in the typical penniless bind such students are forced to endure, the opportunity arose to purchase a small lot of Golden Age Marvels—Timelys, as they're usually named—including such books as *Human Torch* No. 1 and No. 2, *Red Raven* No. 1, *Marvel Mystery Comics* 7-11, 13-16, *Daring Mystery Comics* No. 4 and No. 5, *Mystic Comics* No. 3 and No. 4 and several dozen others, for the sum of $400. To me, this was an astronomical sum of money, an amount which I simply didn't have in the bank at the time. So I borrowed it from a friend and repaid it over a period of seven months. It was this lot which started me on my way to collecting Timelys, and this was the first time I sought financing for my collection. It would not be my last.

When I mentioned to people how much I had spent for what amounted to a trivial pile of comic books, and how I obtained the money, I was told I was crazy. It was bad enough that I had spent *four hundred dollars* for comic books; but to go into debt for seven months was completely off the deep end.

How persepctives have changed! To buy that lot of comics today would certainly cost upwards of four *thousand* dollars. Unless one is well-heeled enough to toss around that kind of money with impunity, and one wants to accumulate an extensive collection of key comic books over the next few years, then one must give serious consideration to the possibility of going into debt for long periods of time.

SOME MATHEMATICAL FACTS OF LIFE

Let us assume that you wish to purchase a copy of *Action Comics* No. 1, which in mint condition last year scaled $4200 in the *Price Guide* and this year is listed at $5250. this is an increase of exactly 25% over the 1976-77 period. If we project this rate of increase, then *Action* No. 1 will be listed at roughly $6550 in the 1978 *Guide*.

The time-honored method of purchasing a desired item—by saving up for it—could prove more expensive than negotiating a loan for the same amount of time. To save up for a $5250 comic book in one year's time would mean putting away over $400 each month, but by the time enough money has accumulated, the price of the book will have risen by over a thousand dollars.

Money is power, and nowhere is this power more evident than in the relationship of borrower to lender.

On the other hand, to take out a loan for $5000 (in round numbers) at 12½% per annum would cost, nominally, $312.50, since interest is charged only on the unpaid balance. Once the loan has been repaid, the *Action* No. 1 will have cost $5562.50 althogether; but it will scale $6550 in the *Price Guide*. By financing the purchase, one can save nearly $1000.

These calculations entail the hidden assumptions that *Action* No. 1 will continue to maintain a growth in *Price Guide* value of 25% per year, and that the *Price Guide* accurately reflects the prices charged and paid for comic books like *Action* No. 1 from year to year. If you agree that these assumptions are valid and reasonable, then financing might turn out to be a sound way to beat comic book inflation.

SHOULD YOU TAKE OUT A LOAN?

The HFC commercial runs, "Never borrow money needlessly." Nowhere does this apply with more force than in comic collecting. If you are thinking seriously of obligating yourself financially for long periods of time, you *must* ask yourself the question, *Do I really need these comics?* Do comics mean more to you than the new car you were going to buy, or the new furniture, or the new clothes, or just the money sitting there in the bank?

My own priorities follow this pattern: The item I buy first is the one less likely to be available in the future, or likely to cost significantly more. If I had $1000 to spend on a new car or on comics for my collection, I would *always* pick up the comics. Cars, like disease, will always be available, and in the meantime alternative modes of transportation may be found. But who knows when the next chance to pick up those hard to find comics will arise?

Do not misunderstand me! I am *not* advocating that any collector should get up to his neck in debt paying enormous sums of money for comic books. That way lies bankruptcy! But one fine day a large and beautiful lot of comic books may blow your way, priced fairly and accurately according to whatever standards of fairness and accuracy you maintain, and that you might be short of money to pay for the lot all at once. In those circumstances, I believe you should look into borrowing the money rather than letting the books go.

HOW TO OBTAIN A LOAN

Loans are not easy to obtain. Every potential lender sees a loan as a *risk*: the borrower may be unable to repay the loan, and the lender's money will be lost. For this reason, the borrower may be asked for *collateral*, which is a commodity whose ownership will be turned over to the lender in case of default, or a *guarantor*, a person who volunteers to make himself liable on the borrower's behalf in case the borrower fails to meet his obligations.

There are three avenues open to a borrower who needs money. He can negotiate a private loan from a friend or relative; he can approach a lending institution such as a finance company, a credit union or a bank; or he can (in the case of a comic collector) ask the seller for terms. The first of these avenues is most congenial, the second the most difficult, and the third about midway.

PRIVATE LOANS

Friends or relatives with money are generally a godsend to the collector. Interest is often nominal or even nonexistent, and if a payment is missed for some well-intentioned reason or other, nobody comes down on your head. Friends and relatives might lend a sympathetic ear to your hobby / cause, might actually get interested in what you're into as a result of having lent your money. You are probably well enough known to a potential lender that questions of collateral are not even raised. (Watch out: Some relatives are devils in disguise!)

LENDING INSTITUTIONS

Suppose, though, that a friend or a relative is unavailable. Then what? You *could* try a bank. Banks have phenomenal amounts of money on hand—big banks have in the past financed *entire countries*. Let me recommend, at this point, the book *The Age Of Uncertainty*, by John Kenneth Galbraith, for a very readable, anecdotal account of the story of money and its manipulation throughout the past three centuries. I'm indebted to that book for a truly wonderful insight as to how banks literally manufacture money where none was there before. One would think that banks, with all these avenues open to them, would be a good way to raise much-needed capital.

Money is a strange and wonderful thing. Nothing promotes garbage like its presence, and nothing inhibits quality like its absence.

Not so. A bank will not usually lend money to somebody who wants to build up a comic collection. They need some kind of evidence of financial security, such as a steady job, ownership of attachable commodities such as furniture or a car (but most definitely *not* a comic collection), ownership of stocks, bonds, insurance policies or other financial whatnot, and so forth. The borrower should preferably exude an aura of "respectability" by wearing the appropriate clothing (i.e., suit and tie). Guarantors are a must for all but the smallest loans, which if you come to think of it, means that the bank ultimately tries to earn its interest without having to take any risk at all. There are, on the whole, far too many sacrifices which have to be made by the borrower to make banks a reasonable source of capital. Unless you are personally acquainted with a bank manager, the word is to keep away.

Further, if by some miracle you do manage to gain a loan from a bank, be sure you're *never* delinquent with your payments. Missing one payment is frequently the signal for them to attach whatever assets and eye teeth you had to put up for the loan, and since banks can afford the best legal aid, you really have no recourse. Banks can screw up your life but good.

Loan companies are a bit better. Just watch out for characters like the one in this issue's editorial cartoon. Loan companies will lend money on much less collateral than banks; but their interest rates are frequently higher because more of their accounts go bad (as a result of their liberal lending schemes) and they have to cover those losses. Be sure you know in advance exactly what the loan will cost you in interest before you sign anything (a good policy in any case).

You might have a credit union operating where you work. If so, it is an excellent idea to join. If you are a member of a credit union, it is very much like having a rich friend or relative; you can always draw money, up to some reasonable limit, on your signature alone, without having to put up anything at all for collateral. Who knows—you might never want to borrow money for comic books, but you might need it for a car or furniture or such. My own credit union has helped out on several occasions. A watchword: make sure your loan contract allows you to pay ahead on your loan, and gives you credit on your interest.

TERMS

Comic dealers recognize that their customers may not be able to pay for their needed books all at once. Depending on how good a customer you are, you may be able to negotiate terms when you commit yourself to buying an expensive book. You might ask the dealer to hold the book until you raise the money, or you might pay a fraction of the cost of the book as a down payment or deposit.

When a comic dealer or a collector has an expensive book for sale, it is much more difficult than he might make it appear for him to sell the book. Buyers who can spend a thousand dollars at a time are very scarce in the comic collecting field, and dealers are far more interested in a commitment to buy, even if they have to wait for the money, than they are in having their money tied up in an expensive book. Many dealers will not buy expensive books unless they have a buyer already in mind.

ETHICS AND PITFALLS

Once you commit yourself to a loan, you are ethically bound to see it through. You must make every effort to meet your payments to the penny, to pay ahead if possible (and especially if you get credit for it)—in short, to get out of debt as soon as you can. It makes good sense to maintain an excellent credit rating, since there may come a time when you *really need* the money, not for comics but for a house, hospital bills, or something equally serious. Burnt bridges are difficult to rebuild.

On the other hand, the lender is ethically bound not to harass a borrower if his payments are being satisfactorily maintained. If you find your lender is on your back all the time or behaving objectionably towards your mutual arrangement, never borrow from him again. Money is power, and nowhere is this power more evident than in the relationship of borrower to lender. The lender has a great deal of power over the borrower as long as the loan is in force, and the borrower must beware of its abuse.

It is impossible in an editorial of this small size to cover adequately all the ways and means of financing a comic collection. The best policy for the collector seeking financial assistance is to keep both eyes wide open, to carry out all arithmetic before signing anything, and to use liberal amounts of sheer common sense. □

COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE

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COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE is published monthly by G&T Enterprises, 260 Wellesley Street East, No. 2203, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4X 1G8. Return postage (in coin) must accompany all articles, art, photographs, etc., if they are to be returned and no responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials. All letters sent to **Collector's Dream Magazine** will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and as subject to **Collector's Dream Magazine's** right to edit and to comment editorially. All rights reserved on entire contents. All writers, photographers and artists retain sole copyright of material printed within. Subscription rates: 12 issues $5.00. Single copy: 30 cents plus 25 cents postage.

Printed in U.S.A.

THE TREE WHERE SPIDER-MAN WAS BORN

By Bennet Marks

The Marvel Universe was once a tightly-knit continuity, but it seems to have gotten a bit frayed at the edges lately.

In the ancient Japanese art of *bonsai*, a small, living tree is sculpted towards a desired form. This is accomplished through co-operation with the tree's own life-force; by careful pruning, binding, and tending, the artist coaxes the tree's growth patterns into producing his masterpiece. Sometimes the *bonsai* will surprise the man, not by resisting, but by obeying his intentions in a manner he had never imagined. The process must not be rushed or forced. The tree's natural tendencies must be directed, never broken. A *bonsai* may outlive its original artist and be passed on to another, and so on for several generations. The art requires great subtlety, tremendous patience, and infinite respect, for the spectators, for the previous and subsequent artists, and for the tree itself.

The Marvel Universe is a *bonsai*. Stan Lee began it, fifteen years ago, and under the direction of many editors, writers, and artists, it slowly grew into one of the most surprisingly intricate and beautiful worlds of literary fantasy. Many characters, many stories, each with its own distinctive nature, all interlinking to constitute one single ongoing work of art, internally consistent, thematically coherent, esthetically harmonious.

Pretty fancy words for a bunch of comics, right? You could never have applied them to the comics on which I grew up. They refused to make sense. Although each story did have its own plot, which was often comprehensible, there were always left-over questions around and before and behind the story which rendered it incomprehensible in the extreme. Why is Lightning Lad's twin sister now several years younger than he is? How is it that in one story Lois Lane was standing with Jor-El and Lara when Kandor was stolen, while in another Luthor was with them at the same moment? When an alien publicly announces his intention to conquer the world in HAWKMAN, why doesn't Flash run over to help? Why doesn't Green Lantern enlarge Kandor? The list is endless. And there are deeper questions, too. How did it affect Lana Lang's psyche to visit a dozen worlds and times before she was twenty-one? How does the general public react to certain knowledge of extraterrestrial life? Why did the Oans permit World War II? I remember a letter printed in SUPERBOY, about fifteen years ago. The author wanted to know why the Atlanteans in SUPERBOY had fish-tails, while in Aquaman stories they had legs. The answer (paraphrased): "Are you kidding? We're writing comics, not history. Although we do keep certain details the same from issue to issue, like Ma and Pa Kent's first names, we see no reason to stick to one version of Atlantis, or anything, if we don't want to."

Marvel was different. All its characters seemed to live in the same universe, one which made sense on its own terms. Matt Murdock could serve as legal counsel to the Fantastic Four and, as Daredevil, battle Spider-Man's old villain Electro. The Kree and the Skrulls, introduced separately, turned out to have a long-standing military-political relationship involving galactic power bases. Quicksilver, a foe of the X-Men, reformed to join the Avengers, and later married one of the Inhumans. The stories are not wholly contained by the pages, but extend beyond, crossing, interlocking, forming a coherent unit. A picture forms: here on Earth, under the seas lie the cities of Atlantis and Lemuria, and in Europe dark Latveria; SHIELD and Hydra battle endlessly across continents for power and freedom. Somewhere at the edges of space-time float the supernatural realms of Asgard and Olympus, and Mephisto's evil kingdom; the Kree and the Skrulls continue their war. Patterns develop, spheres of influence form, paths progress. When they intersect, we have conflict, adventure, battles, suspense: Quicksilver vs. Spider-Man, Dr. Doom vs. the Sub-Mariner, the saga of the Cosmic madonna, the tragedy of Ego and Galactus. The framework is wonderfully rich and productive, giving rise naturally to logical, well-motivated, exciting stories, and each story adds to the framework. A *bonsai*.

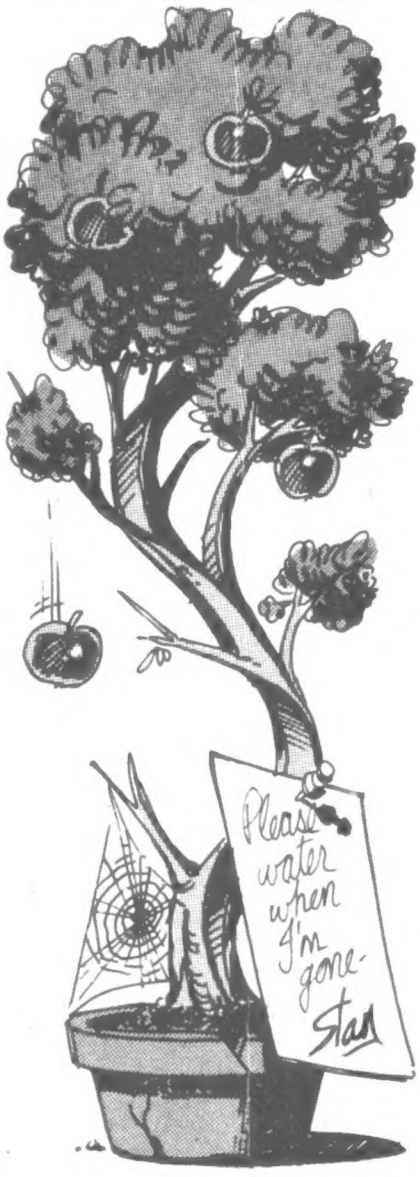

Illustration by Ken Steacy

Lately, I'm afraid, the tree has been sorely damaged. Contradictions crack the branches: we have two Frankenstein monsters, two Merlins, two Castles Latveria, two Egyptian pantheons, and so on with no explanation. Oddly-shaped blocks of wood, and sometimes iron nails and bits of plastic, are wedged into exposed portions of the tree: Spider-Man meets Superman, Kirby's Eternals leap in, Sax Rohmer's world is added in a lump sum. Entire races, worlds, dimensions are thrown on casually, like strings of popcorn. Arbitrariness worms in, continuity is lost, established facts and characters change capriciously, and even if I close my eyes I can still hear the sound of splintering wood.

I do not think the artistic or financial value of a consistent fantasy universe can be overemphasized. Many people think that fantasy and science fiction is easy to write, that "you make it up as you go along" and "nobody can tell you you're wrong", but of course the opposite is true. Unlike the mainstream writer, the fantasy writer must present a *totally convincing* world in order to draw the reader in. The world must appear inevitable, every aspect independent of author and audience, so that the reader might willingly suspend his disbelief and enter the world to experience it from the inside. Otherwise no empathy for the characters can truly exist, no message can truly be communicated, no excitement can truly be felt—all are overwhelmed by the feeling "it's just a story". Intellectually every reader *knows* "it's just a story", but it is of utmost importance that he not *feel* that way; if he does he will not care, and getting a reader to care—if only for a moment, if only for some character—is what writing is about. It is possible to achieve this willing suspension of disbelief in eight pages, or even one, but the total involvement of a reader which can be

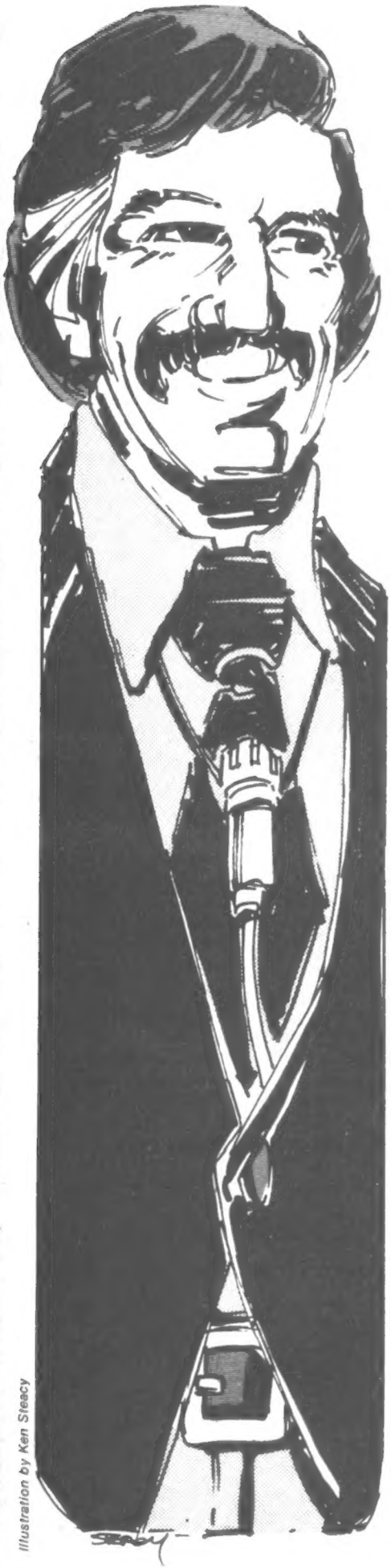

Illustration by Ken Steacy

achieved when a world is scrupulously sustained across hundreds of pages can be so intense and long-lasting as to shock both the author and the reader himself. J.R.R. Tolkien is a perfect example. As easily as I can look down from the World Trade Centre, I can gaze from a southern mountaintop of the Ered Luin in Middle-Earth. To the north are the Grey Havens, from where the Elves leave in their ships for Valinor; east is the Shire, where around this time of evening Hobbits are drinking tea, or ale for some, and gossiping about the neighbors. Further east is the Elves' Mirkwood, and thankfully far, far south-east is Mordor, "where the Shadows lie." When I read *The Lord of the Rings*, I believe in Middle-Earth completely; there is geography, history, people, languages, life as far as the eye can see or the mind can imagine. Of this effect Tolkien writes (in his essay "On Fairy-Stories"):

> *"...the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside."*

This phenomenon is also associated with *Star Trek*. Gene Roddenberry's vision of a plausible, consistent galactic civilization provided an implicit framework in which every episode took place. Despite dozens of apparent errors on the part of the various writers, most Trekkers could still give you a fair half-hour treatise on Federation economics or Vulcan history—*Lost in Space* was never like this. And much of the show's continued popularity derives from the fact that the world of the characters seems to go beyond each episode, beyond all 79 episodes, so that each viewer can involve himself in that world as much as he wishes, as long as he wishes, without sacrificing his intelligence and sensibilities.

I discussed this topic with a friendly editor working for Marvel's competitors. "The primary audience is ten to fourteen years old," he informed me, "They do not write letters, they do not attend conventions, they are not fans. You have to write for them." I asked naively, "Can't you write for a larger audience which includes both them and an older group?" "Can't be done," I was told, "The Green Lantern / Green Arrow experiment proved it. The book died."

All the Green Lantern / Green Arrow experiment proved, I believe, is that piety and pomposity cannot replace plot. Writing for the older, more sophisticated audience does not necessarily mean producing a steady diet of drugs, ecology, and depression. Logical, well-motivated fantasy-adventure stories would be enough for most of us, and need not lose the primary audience. It should be noted that the statement "the primary audience is ten to fourteen years old" implicitly assumes that the tendency of people to stop reading comics at age fourteen is an immutable fact of nature, rather than an indication of the weakness of current comics. As Jay L. Zilber once wrote to National:

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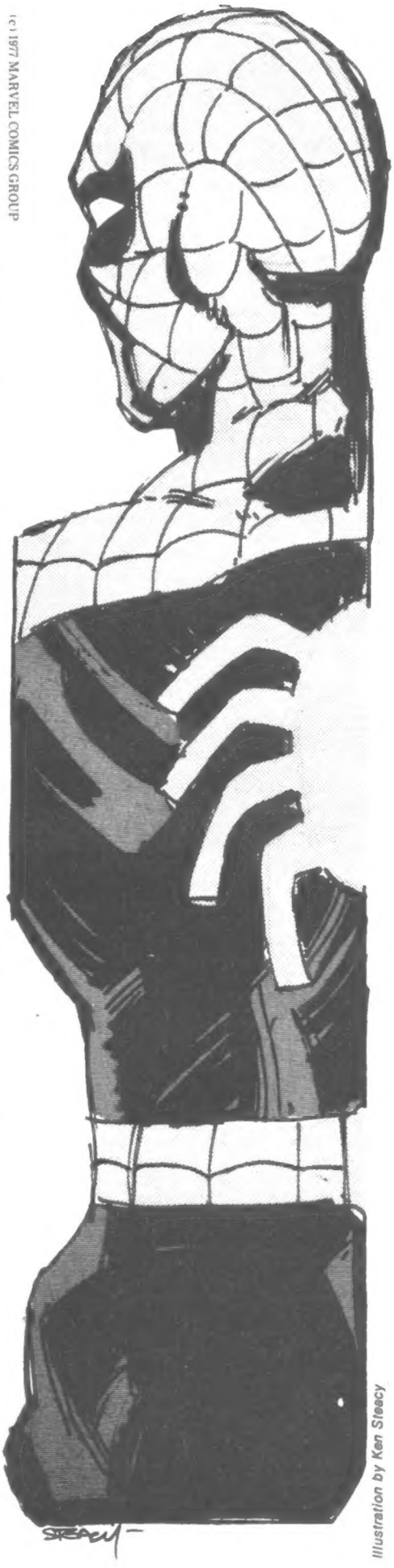

Illustration by Ken Steacy

"What sort of problem would prevent you from explaining the contradictions? If the majority of your readers are unconcerned about these details, then they could hardly be concerned if there were no more details for them to be concerned about! One would almost think National has a distaste for older readers who do care about these things.

"Furthermore, it would seem to me that if some of the weaker qualities were abolished [specifically the continuity problem], it's just possible that when the young readers get older and start worrying about continuity, they just might keep on reading comics after the time they might otherwise lose interest. Perhaps many readers give up comics when they become aware of the shoddier practices of all comics publishers and figure that if the writers, artists, and editors don't care enough, why should they?"

Nothing I have written so far is unrelated to the fundamental task of making money. It is unlikely that any reader has ever said "This comic is logical, consistent, and intelligent—I won't buy it!", but many older readers have certainly said the opposite. Consequently, it is simply good business sense not to neglect the literary values of the older readers. For example, I buy almost all the comics Marvel publishes; I also recommend them to my friends, defend them in conversations with parents who object to their children reading them, and bring them to my Comparative Literature courses as respectable examples of modern mythology. As the *bonsai* becomes more damaged, these activities are less likely to continue. If and when the tree dies, they will cease altogether, resulting in short-range and long-range dollars-and-cents losses to the company. Oddly enough, the reasons for these losses *cannot* be discerned by an examination of the sales figures. It is easy to measure that, say, sales for a particular comic rise eighteen per cent when Spider-Man is portrayed the cover. On the other hand, it may be difficult or impossible to measure directly the fact that some readers eventually quit buying comics because they feel that certain characters are being spread too thin, confrontations are becoming too arbitrary, carefully-established versimilitude is being sacrificed too casually. And yet the second effect is as real as the first. Sales figures are of course the most significant indicator available to the company, but overdependence on them and misinterpretation of them leads to a frantic pursuit of passing fads and capriciously-changing opinions—trends which may (momentarily) capture a fickle reader at the risk of losing a loyal one, and which overemphasize short-term gains at the risk of long-term damage to the entire line. A company has a reputation, a characteristic style, a particular quality; these are business assets, just as its copyrighted top-selling character is a business asset. The effects of a particular action (such as putting a killer shark, or a non-existent woman, on the cover of GHOST RIDER) or a general action (such as neglecting consistency) on the reputation of a company are difficult to correlate with sales figures, but in the long run they will be reflected in the financial statement.

> **"Lately, the Marvel Universe has been dying of careless neglect."**

Marvel's competition is beginning to appreciate the value of a consistent universe. Ask them today about Atlantis, and you will get a straight-faced explanation stating that there have been several different underwater cities established during Earth's history, all of which land-dwellers designate by the generic name "Atlantis"—and that's what we had in mind all along, isn't it? And the reason baby Lana Lang appears in Superbaby stories, when we also published a story showing her family moving into Smallville when she was a teenager, is simply that they moved out when she was very young and moved back in some years later—and similarly with Lex Luthor, and Pete Ross, and... One can only admire the effort going into this endeavor, but I have my doubts about the results. Bones show through the skin of artifice too easily. You can't make a *bonsai* out of a cabbage patch, although you can make a very nice cabbage patch.

Now let me get down to specifics.

Lately the Marvel Universe has been dying of careless neglect. This neglect takes many interrelated forms; some of the overlapping categories include the following:

CONTRADICTIONS

When we first met the Inhumans, some years ago in the pages of FANTASTIC FOUR, Gorgon was pursuing Medusa, the Royal Family was hiding in New York, and an agent of Maximus called the Seeker was rounding everyone up to bring them to the Great Refuge. These circumstances have never been satisfactorily explained, but from the "Origins of the Inhumans" back-up in THOR we have learned that for thousands of years the Inhumans lived on an island called Attilan and, when humans came too close to discovering it, Black Bolt left in search of a new home for his people. We can surmise that after Black Bolt's departure Maximus engineered a political coup which resulted in civil war and established the circumstances set forth in F.F. The actual "untold" story is one I have been waiting years to read, and when the Inhumans were given their own comic I expected it would be told there.

Doug Moench, intent on his "cosmic space opera", seems to be writing about some other Inhumans altogether. He insists often and explicitly that the Great Refuge, "Attilan", is the Inhuman's ancient ancestral home, filled with time-worn palaces and riddled with mysterious bottomless fountains, Kree devices, and age-old Inhuman burial chambers. Doug ignores (or is ignorant of) the fact that this new city in the Himalayas has *already* been destroyed once, by Black Bolt's deliberate shout, which shattered Maximus' force-shield barrier; he also twists Inhuman political chronology into contradictory knots (making ancient King Randac and recent Chief Geneticist Agon contemporaries), and implies that the Inhumans are modified Kree rather than, as the Sentry once told us, modified humans.

None of these errors is necessary. With minor modifications Doug's stories could have been written in accordance with the established facts. The fact that they weren't shows a disturbing lack of scrupulousness, a neglectful disregard for previous authors and attentive readers. Worse, by ignoring the details of prior stories, Doug implies that the details in all comic stories—even his own—exist to be ignored. Why should the reader care more than the writers, artists, and editors? It is difficult to draw a reader into a fantasy world which changes suddenly and arbitrarily. When it is clear that a writer has not "entered" a given world, it is impossible for even the most willing reader to "follow" him in.

I do not mean to single out Doug Moench. These days contradictions occur in droves. The Silver Surfer says "I cannot summon Galactus here, where life abounds!" (SILVER SURFER No. 1), while Johnny Storm claims "...this is now a dead world—and no good for Galactus!" (FANTASTIC FOUR No. 174). Moondragon's origin shifts a little every time it's told. The kingdom of the Trolls is first a supernatural realm beyond Asgard, then a cave beneath Earth; Satan's Hell travels in the other direction. Multiplying this list ten-fold, although possible, would serve no purpose. My advice on committing contradictions is: DON'T DO IT! Nobody expects perfection, and mistakes will always creep in, but a little extra attention and effort will go a long way. Contradictions should never be necessary, and I have rarely if ever seen a story which could not have been re-written, with some patience and ingenuity, in accordance with the established Marvel Universe.

As for contradictions already published: many of them can be reconciled, sometimes resulting in fine stories (the "two Captain Americas" is a good example). Two Merlins are fairly easy to explain, and even the confusion around the Inhumans can, with some strain, be squared away (for details send S.A.S.E. to...). But such constructions should be avoided when possible, as they create a cabbage-patch atmosphere reminiscent of Lana Lang's perfume. Certain other contradictions appear to be beyond reclamation, and in those extreme cases it might be best to declare some stories "non-canonical"—they "never happened", as the Baker Street Irregulars insist of some of Mr. Holmes' more implausible published adventures. In this category might fall the X-Men's "alien Frankenstein monster" and Hulk's "Egyptian gods".

LOSS OF CONTINUITY

Dr. Strange is currently undergoing a crisis of self-doubt in the DEFENDERS. I would like to feel sorry for the man, but insofar as he has just resolved an almost

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identical problem in the pages of his own comic, yet seems to have learned nothing from it, I find it difficult to sympathize. Under the individually fine hands of two gifted writers, Stephen Strange has managed to become a repetitive and somewhat unbelievable character.

Cross-overs ("crosses-over?") and guest appearances in Marvel comics used to have a very natural and unforced appearance, no doubt the result of careful consideration and hard work. Major characters entered into combined adventures each for his or her own reasons, carrying with them their own personalities and circumstances; supporting characters moved from comic to comic in accordance with their own purposes, and were frequently busy (rather than hibernating) during their absences. In general, characters were respected by each writer who scripted for them, and in that way consistent development and depth were possible.

Perhaps Marvel's scope has grown too large, or some guiding principle has been lost, or the multiplicity of editors is making itself felt, but for whatever reason fragmentation and artificiality are the rules of the day. The Hulk roams the Midwest in his own comic, but hangs around New York in the DEFENDERS; Jack Kirby's Captain America diverges sharply from the AVENGERS version. Discrepancies which develop in a given comic or character with the passing of time are even worse, although sometimes harder to detect. Personalities are destroyed and great moments retroactively trivialized for the sake of plot convenience. This is particularly noticeable with the loftier characters. For example, one brilliant stroke in the original Galactus epic comes when Galactus promises never to attack Earth again, and the Watcher affirms "The word of Galactus is truth itself!" In that one exchange we have been shown that a world-devastating "villain", by our standards a mass murderer, may still have a sense of honor and morality almost beyond our understanding—with the philosophically significant implication that we, even if we live our lives in a manner judged "moral" by other humans, may be perpetrating crimes beyond reason on animals and other "lesser" beings. An implicit analogy is established between Galactus and humanity, without the one being reduced or the other being exaggerated.

Unfortunately some writers lacked the resolve necessary to sustain this vision, or the restraint necessary to leave it alone. Within a few issues Galactus was back threatening Earth again, too hungry to remember his vow, thereby rendering himself a liar and the Watcher a fool. In retrospect, the "great moment" of the first story turned out to be nothing but air and noise. One can only wonder how Galactus ever survived the millions of years before he discovered Earth, or how he ever acquired a reputation for honesty. The second story not only castrates the first, it also undercuts itself and all future stories by demonstrating that deeper meanings and personalities may be freely discarded when they interfere with simple plotlines. I am not suggesting that Galactus should have never been seen again—the Thor-Galactus stories and Galactus-High Evolutionary confrontation show how he can appear in a story without violating his own nature. But Galactus should never be *used*, casually *exploited*—nor should any other character.

And so, over the years the Stranger has gone from an awesome alien scientist / collector, to a self-righteous moralist ready to destroy Earth for her sins, to an immature sadist toying with sick minds on some Kree-controlled asteroid; the Watcher interferes daily; the Grandmaster, once the dignified adept of a sophisticated game, turns into an obsessive "galactic gambler" willing to bet planets on the meaningless flip of a coin. Of these lapses, only the Watcher's has ever been explained (albeit ingeniously). On a (slightly) more mundane level, the Silver Surfer, a noble and near-messianic figure whose one thwarted desire is for the freedom of infinite space, becomes one more two-fisted hero pining for the chick he left behind, and his millennia of cosmic service are collapsed into a few decades so that she can pine back at him. And Black Bolt, who ostensibly did not speak between early childhood and the dramatic moment he both freed and destroyed his city, has of late been mumbling at every danger that comes his way. This last instance particularly disturbs me. I remember my feelings when I read the first story in which the enigmatically mute king spoke: I was as awe-struck as any common Inhuman at the catastrophic release of unsuspected force, and astonished that a comic book could draw me in so completely. Black

Bolt should never have spoken again. The moment should have stood, inviolate, a tribute to the sense of restrained power which is his chief characteristic. Now, when I re-read that story, I find that subsequent excesses have made it meaningless, and made Black Bolt a duller and poorer character. If writers could find no more interesting or original way to end the Inhuman-Hulk (or Inhuman-Surfer, or Inhuman-Kaptoid) confrontations than to have Black Bolt speak *again*, then the stories should not have been written; if they were simply too lazy to bother to come up with another way, then they (and their editors) should be reprimanded. Similar comments can be made about Satana and her Basilisk: once, it's startling; four times, and it's not even startling once.

I thought the "team-up" comics would be helpful in defining characters and sustaining continuity, but so far the opposite has been true. MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE started reasonably well, with the Thing either helping heroes (like Daredevil) with problems carried over from their own comics, or becoming involved in adventures through some personal link with his past. But the "Reed sends Ben to investigate disturbance" formula was apparently too easy to resist, and the comic has become petrified as a result. I was disappointed to find *no* issues set in the time period before the cyborg suit, featuring the non-super-powered Ben Grimm (what a good story that could have been!), and only one story with the cyborg suit. "This story takes place before F.F. No. ..." is no substitute for continuity, although it may avoid outright contradictions. MARVEL TEAM-UP suffers from this same malady, often seeming more like a one-shot experiment than a natural extension of its protagonists' lives. Annuals, giant-size issues, and black-and-white stories also tend towards this "one-shot" flavor; in an effort to produce a "block-busting senses-shattering extravaganza months in the making", a writer may easily neglect to connect his story to the Marvel mainstream.

In his valuable essay on Dracula, Marv Wolfman mentions "a certain red-caped hero who hasn't *any* personality at all because there is no one person coordinating his movements." This should be taken as a clear warning to the various writers and editors associated with a certain wall-crawling hero who may soon be appearing in as many as four different titles.

Discontinuity can also result when a writer endows a character with enormous power in order to facilitate the plot, and does not consider how difficult such power will be to contain later. In the first DEFENDERS annual, for example, Dr. Strange teleports himself and his colleagues to France, India, and the Western U.S. with a wave of his hand. This simplifies the problem of getting to Europe without a quinjet, but payment must be made: how can any villain stand up to a hero who can teleport himself or the villain thousands of miles away without discernable effort? Subsequent stories must either be dull, or be inconsistent, or keep Dr. Strange unconscious for three issues—as he was in the Sons of the Serpent story, causing a Strange aficionado I know to jump up and down and use foul language. Clear and serious limits should be established for

> **"How many previously unknown races like the Inhumans can be discovered without straining the credibility of the entire Marvel Universe?"**

Strange's teleportational abilities, such as: they require time and extended concentration. Or, the co-operation of the subject is required. Or, they are physically, emotionally, and mystically taxing. Or, they open him to supernatural attack. Any one of these limits would make his frequent non-use of his powers more reasonable, and improve the stories involved. Similar attention should be paid to any powers which are so potentially overwhelming as to make it difficult to write logical stories around them, including the following: the time-travel powers of Kang, Dr. Strange, and Dr. Doom; the mind-altering and memory-erasing powers of Prof. X and Dr. Strange; and the reality-altering powers of Thor and the Space Phantom.

OVERCROWDING

In a letter to me Ralph Macchio once asked "How many previously unknown races like the Inhumans can be discovered without straining the credibility of the entire Marvel Universe?" The admonitory answer: not many more. And this also applies to secret organizations, alien empires, pantheons, alternate dimensions, and literary realms. Elements such as these should be added slowly, with a sense of economy, and only after their implications for the Marvel *bonsai* have been considered. Otherwise the Marvel Universe will become crowded beyond control, contradictions and discontinuities will develop, and reader involvement will become more difficult and less worthwhile.

I was appalled when a complete race of cat people were created *ab nihilo*, and an established character granted retroactive membership, just to give Tigra an origin. Parallel evolution—humanoid felines evolving from cats as humans evolved from apes—represents an amazing coincidence, like Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern tossing 93 heads in a row, and should not be foisted upon the reader for trivial reasons. After all, Tigra could have been explained without the cat people, or the cat people explained without the massive improbability of parallel evolution—as I hope they eventually will be. It is always better to link new situations to established ones, taking advantage of beliefs already suspended, rather than expecting the reader to accept hypothesis piled upon hypothesis without pattern or let-up. The story in which the Inhumans were shown to be an early experiment of the Kree was an admirable example of this technique, and has led (even under Mr. Moench's confused guidance) to several plausible and interesting new plotlines concerning them. Although such techniques can be overused, I am still looking forward to issues which reveal, say, that Red Raven's winged colony was started some centuries ago by a time-traveling descendant of Warren Worthington III, or that the Atlanteans can be traced back to a Stone Age tribe of humans transformed into water-breathers by Zeus' brother Neptune for reasons of his own. Interconnections like these can relieve some of the weight of coincidence which bends the *bonsai* almost to the breaking point.

Also, all such "hidden races" should be solidly fixed in space and time. Where were the cat people during the Renaissance, and when did they emigrate to the U.S.? What is the extent of Atlantean-Lemurian contact over the last thousand years? How long have the Inhumans lived in the Great Refuge (hmmm...)? Keeping track of such details gives these races a measure of verisimilitude which is necessary to counterbalance their "unreal" aspects, and permits a degree of audience involvement comparable to Star Trek's—which can only be beneficial to Marvel.

Similar comments apply to alien races. The internal and foreign policies of the Kree and the Skrulls form one of the most productive substructures of the Marvel framework. Finally we have left behind the pulp cliché of "terrible unknown beings from outer space come to invade Earth" (for no discernible reason) and entered the arena of interstellar imperialism which affects Earth peripherally. Marvel's outer-space stories are generally better when they relate to this framework (like Hulk's Toad Men who pirated Skrull technology) and only involve a reasonably small number of recognizable alien races. The "new civilization every story" format characteristic of certain phases of Thor, Warlock, and the Guardians of the Galaxy should be discouraged; it results in ephemeral "one-shot" stories and contributes to massive overcrowding. Again, space- and time-frames deserve careful attention. Do the Skrulls really come from another galaxy, called "the Skrull Galaxy"? (Too far away.) Do the Kree really control "a thousand thousand worlds"? (Too many.) How long ago were the Cotati slaughtered?

The number of divine pantheons being batted around the Marvel Universe is another example of overcrowding. One active group of gods is enough (more than enough) to explain the paradigmatic myths common to Mankind, and, without embracing European chauvinism, I will admit that I would have been satisfied with the parallel hierarchies of Greek and Norse mythologies. The current chaos of Greek, K'un L'unian, darkling, Titanic, two Egyptian, Norse, Cthulhu, various African, Voudounian, Judeo-Christian, Hyborean, Paman, S'ahra Sharnian, Vishantian, Indian, Eternal, lunar, Celestial, Aztec, Arcturian, N'Garaian...each with its own exclusive claim on the origin of the universe, the creation of life and Man, the course of history, the disposition of our immortal souls...The poten-

tial respect and attention any one (or three, at the most) of these pantheons could have commanded from the serious reader are lost in the disorganization. It is time to trim the list by interconnecting and identifying some of these pantheons, as one of the Egyptian was interconnected with the Norse, and by declaring a moratorium on future gods—at least until some of this morass can be straightened out. Time-scale is important here, too, and considerably more difficult. The gods must be old enough to be gods, of course, but also young enough to relate to the human condition—after all, they are insistently anthropomorphic. I think sixty thousand to one hundred thousand years is old enough for any human-oriented pantheon, with one or two million years the extreme upper limit. Certainly the eight billion year figure mentioned for the Greek gods is absurd (unless time-travel is a factor, which it might be—but I hope not). There wasn't even a solar system that long ago.

And, of course, all the time-scales must be correlated. The birth of the gods, and the time periods during which they actively interfered in human history; the fall of Atlantis and Lemuria, and their re-founding by water-breathers; the Kree Year Zero; the birth of Dracula, the rise of Rome, and the death of the original Black Knight—everything fits in somewhere. It would not be appropriate for the Kree to separate the first Inhumans from their primitive fellow humans at the same time that the advanced surface Atlantean culture was at its height.

I find Marvel's recent attempts to use Judeo-Christian mythology feeble and somewhat distasteful. On the one hand, Marvel is unwilling to handle Jehovah as they have Odin (i.e., a powerful but limited being whose existence has indirectly given rise to certain human beliefs, many of them incorrect)—wisely, no doubt, as more of their readers believe in Jehovah than in Odin, and would perceive such treatment as offensive. On the other hand, an ineffable, all-powerful, ubiquitous presence makes for a lousy character in a continuing series of adventure stories. So we are left with an inexplicable God who intervenes completely at the whim of the writer, as in TOMB OF DRACULA No. 52. Why would an all-powerful God prevent the execution of a Spanish peasant and permit Dracula's destruction of Sheila Whittier? On the theological level this question represents a great mystery, but on the fictional level it is nothing more or less than an abdication of the story-teller's responsibility.

I bring all this up because of its relation to the figure of Satan who has played an active role in the lives of Johnny Blaze, Daimon Hellstrom, Norrin Radd, Stephen Strange, and others. Is this THE Satan (one ontological step below THE True God), who is responsible for the existence of all evil, on all the planets, in all the galaxies, for all time, across all the dimensions and alternate continua? Then why is he so concerned with our insignificant planet, so ignorant of the future and of men's thoughts, so apparently limited by *human* reaction time and emotions and insecurities and errors? Satan's limitations can only be imposed by God (there is nothing intermediate), so his explicit presence and activities in an adventure story are as out of place as God's. Satan / Mephisto

Illustration by Franc Reyes

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is too much a part of the Marvel Universe to be edited out, but I would like to see him explained as a limited being much like Odin, who has the power (under certain conditions) to trap and control the astral bodies of the recently dead for extended periods of time, and who perhaps has convinced himself he is the ultimate source of evil, although in actuality he is not much more important than Pluto or Dormammu. The True God and His Satan, if they exist, must be left in the hearts and minds of the characters and readers, not running around with their tempers high and their dukes up. God alone is enough to overcrowd the Marvel Universe.

Parallel worlds and alternate earths create overcrowding of a more subtle and literary kind. At first, a parallel world "just like this one only slightly different" seems like the perfect way to sidestep the restrictions of the Marvel Universe without producing contradictions. But this seeming advantage is, in the end, illusory. The value of the Marvel Universe is being discarded, even if the Universe itself is not. As I said before, every reader *knows* that, for example, Reed Richards does not actually exist. But it is the implicit agreement of the reader and the writer not to focus on this fact, so that the reader can identify with the imaginary character, learn from his imaginary experiences, and so on. The writer should not press his luck on this point. The spell of which Tolkien writes is fragile. I can think of no more certain way to break it than to introduce a "Reed Richards of Counter-Earth", a "Reed Richards—Thing of Earth B", *ad nauseam*, thus emphasizing the arbitrary and artificial nature of Reed Richards—in other words, focusing on his unreality. The casual use of alternate Earths places the reader squarely "...out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside." Of course, parallel world stories can be entertaining, and it must be fun to demonstrate Marvel's superiority to their competitors in this area. But the idea runs so contrary to the *bonsai*, and the long-range effects are so potentially destructive, that I would recommend never again crossing from the Marvel Universe to a new parallel world, and closing off those already visited, unless they are absolutely necessary—which they rarely are. Do we really need duplicate Whizzers, Hyperions, and Dr. Spectrums in a Squadron Supreme when we already have them in the Squadron Sinister? Isn't that spreading our interest a little thin?

This applies equally well to the "What If...?" series. National once needed "imaginary tales" because their editorial policies and attitudes permitted no room for change in their stories. But for Marvel such a device is unnecessary and, by forcibly placing the reader outside the Marvel Universe, it will tend to break the spell of fantasy. I cannot judge the series in advance, but even if it is technically excellent (as I suspect it will be) and singularly lucrative, it can only work against the Marvel *bonsai*, and may in the end wind up costing readers and money.

I am also concerned about the plethora of independent literary universes that, in some way or another, have been incorporated into the Marvel canon: Bram Stoker, Sax Rohmer, H.P. Lovecraft, Siegel & Shuster, H.G. Wells, Ian Fleming, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert E. Howard, Mary Shelley...The reconciliation of such diverse modern mythologies is a tricky business and should be undertaken with caution if at all. So far Bram has made the transition in good health, Sax not so well.

As for Marvel's own work: NOT EVERYTHING MARVEL PRINTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED PART OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE. "Planet of the Apes" is out and, despite the recent ill-considered Hulk annual, the various one-shot science fiction / supernatural / horror stories are also out. There is strong reason to believe that Deathlok and Killraven live in possible futures of *our* ("real") world, rather than the Marvel Universe. In extreme moments I believe that Shang Chi, Man-Thing, Guardians of the Galaxy, Conan, Kull, Solomon Kane, the current Warlock, and several others might be better off outside the Marvel Universe, for both its sake and theirs. After all, every single alien race the Guardians of the Galaxy encounter must be *somewhere* in the twentieth century, even if the Guardians are only a "possible future" of Spider-Man's Earth (which is a cop-out on the order of "parallel worlds", and should be avoided whenever possible).

Also, the old Timely comics should be considered as suggestive, like Greek and Norse mythology, not infallible, and writers should consider carefully what Timely elements to include in today's stories. And the writer of the INVADERS should remember that he is working under more constrictive restraints than usual—for example, Captain America must be frozen at the end of WW II in the same state of mind he exhibited after waking up in AVENGERS No. 4.

Jack Kirby, Howard the Duck, and Nova also present problems in overcrowding—here, I know, I am treading on sacred ground, so I'll walk carefully. I have great respect for Mr. Kirby and recognize him as one of the most important influences in modern comics. But his current work seems to show a dangerous contempt for the body of material produced by Marvel during his absence, and no editor can control him. His Captain America, we are told, has no identity crisis—and who cares about the carefully constructed psychological crises of the Captain America of the early 1970's? His Eternals and Celestials are the presence behind human history and mythology—and the incompatible Zeus and Olympus and old Atlantis may as well be forgotten, right? If Michelangelo were dripping paint on my *bonsai*, I would politely ask him to move. I hope Kirby's Eternals will be placed squarely *outside* the Marvel Universe, and his writing reserved for the many special projects he does so well. Otherwise he, like God, will overwhelm the entire structure.

I find Howard the Duck extremely funny and pointed but, insofar as it is written to be funny and pointed rather than to fit into a fantasy framework (and quite properly so), it should also be considered non-canonical, and no crossovers should be made. Hellcows and Space Turnips and Cosmic Accountants, if included in the Marvel Universe, would by association render Dracula and Captain Marvel and Dr. Strange farcical rather than fantastic. As for Nova, Marv Wolfman's essay on "fun heroes" offered

no explanations on how Nova's "fun world" fits into the Marvel Universe the way that Omega's "realistic world" and Daimon Hellstrom's "supernatural world" do. In fact, it does not, and the jarring incongruity, along with the "new villain every issue" format, threatens to contaminate an entire *bonsai*. Until the style is changed, or at least explained, I must consider Nova as far away from the Marvel Universe as "Li'l Pals" (was that the name of it?), despite his run-in with Thor.

Finally, the so-called "real world" should not be permitted to overcrowd Marvel's world. Marvel technology surpasses our own, and a story concerning Neil Armstrong's moonwalk seems silly when you consider the Fantastic Four were in the Blue Area ten years earlier—the Apollo landing is far less important in Reed Richards' world than in mine, if in fact it even occurred there. Uri Geller would attract only a minimum of attention in the wake of Moondragon and SHIELD ESPer teams. And, as significant a role as the Marvel Bullpen has played in real life, their role (and lives) would be drastically different in a place where superheros walked the streets. Including oneself in one's stories is a strong temptation, I know, but except for an occasional in-joke it is best resisted.

There are many useful literary devices for hooking and keeping a reader, but in fantasy there can be no substitute for the creation of a shared world in which both the author and the reader can participate. Marvel is in an unparalleled position to create and maintain such a world. I would hate to see this enterprise abandoned. As a reader, I would miss the hours of pleasure—of sheer *fun*—which I experience when I walk about in the Marvel Universe, exploring its mysteries and examining its depths. As a potential writer, I would be sorry to see a rich, productive, living framework—the only one of its kind today—broken and destroyed.

The Marvel Universe deserves more credit, praise, and attention than it is getting. It is a very special place. On that I hope we can all agree. □

(Article written Oct. 19, 1976)

Bennet Marks writes: "I am a 1976 graduate of Brown University, a Ph.D. candidate in mathematics at Stanford University, and a comic book reader and fan of 18 years' standing." He is also creator of the S.E. Calendar, president of Space-Time, Inc., and a frequent visitor to Amber.

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CONTINUITY CONUNDRUMS

By Dick O'Malley

The following article was originally received at our office as five installments of a fan column titled Continuity Conundrums. *They both inspired and were inspired by a voluminous correspondence which arose between their author, Dick O'Malley, and myself. Since they arrived more or less at the same time as the article by Bennet Marks, it occurred to us that we had enough material for a giant Marvel Continuity issue of* Collector's Dream. *This is why you're seeing all these articles at once instead of over a period of half a year or so.*

—George Olshevsky

Introduction

Continuity. Lots of people talk about continuity; not a fan alive today has not heard the word. But how many really know what it means? Precious few, to judge by the constant misuse of the term. So, once and for all, let us set the record straight: in the context of comics, continuity means, simply, the *story and dialogue of a comic strip*. Nothing more, nothing less.

When a continuity freak complains about continuity, what he has probably done is found a *continuity conundrum*, a *problem* with continuity, a *mistake*. A continuity conundrum, for example, occurs on a large scale when Spider-Man ages only seven years between 1962 and 1977. It occurs on a small scale when Peter Parker gets invited to a Christmas party in February.

Since the summer of 1963, when the first issue of THE AVENGERS appeared, the continuity of the Marvel Comics Group has been designed, purposefully, to be the most tightly interwoven web of stories ever attempted. Literally thousands of incidents have been related in the past fourteen years, each relying in some way on what has gone before. In addition to these original stories, works from *other* sources have been culled and affixed to the main body.

In the course of all this, and with hundreds of great (and not-so-great) minds working on the continuity, it is marvelous that so *few* continuity conundrums have arisen. Most of these mistakes can be resolved with very little effort. Some require a bit more thought. Others are direct contradictions requiring one of the other incident to be disregarded (an example of the last being the contradiction of THOR ANNUAL No. 1 by THOR ANNUAL No. 5, of which the latter is the better story).

The purpose of the article is to offer *one* possible resolution to some of the various continuity conundrums that can be found in the body of work about the Marvel Universe. Since truth is a subjective thing, the reader can feel free to draw his own conclusions (gracious of me, huh?).

CHAPTER I: DON BLAKE, SONUVODIN

The year was 1962; the place was an isolated village on the coast of Norway, where a young American physician named Donald Blake was spending the final days of a European vacation. The first warming breezes of summer were being felt in the Nordic lands—it was a time for rebirth. But *this* year, at least, was also a time for menace: the Stone Men from Saturn[1] had invaded the Earth.

Dr. Blake, out to investigate the story of an old fisherman who had seen them land, found the Stone Men—but in the very minute he found them he accidentally stepped on a twig, alerting them. In the chase that ensued, the lame physician was hard-pressed to elude the slowly-moving but tireless Stone Men, and finally found refuge within a complex of caverns, where he discovered the walking stick that was also the hammer of Thor. Armed with this power, Blake single-handedly drove the invaders back into the vast reaches of space.

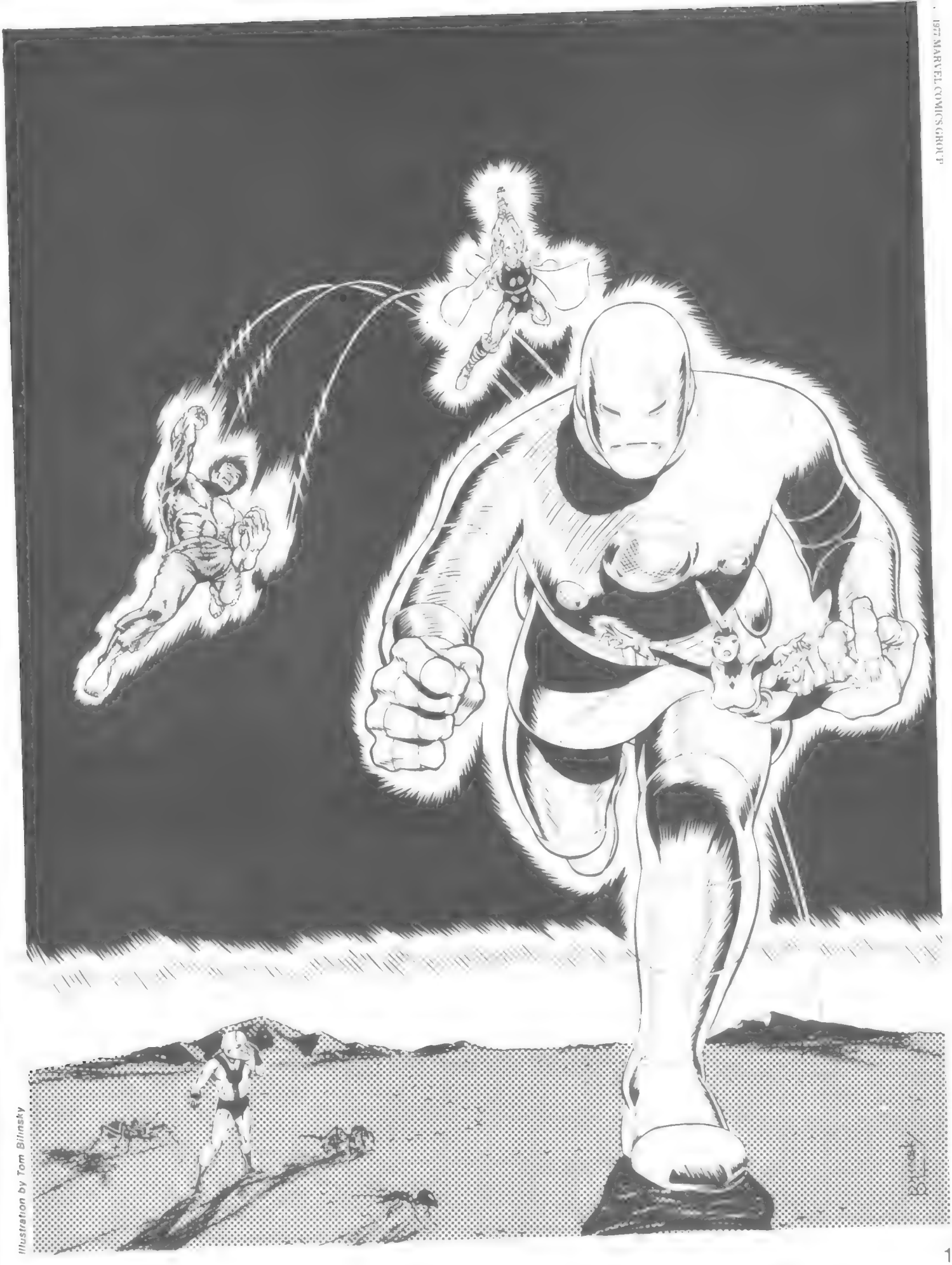
Blake returned to America unsure just what to do with his new-found strengths. Should Thor be kept a secret, to be used only in an emergency? The final decision had to wait a while, since there was a need for medical services in war-torn San Diablo[2]. Displaying the inherent nobility of a god, Dr. Blake volunteered himself and his nurse, Jane Foster[3], to accompany a contingent of American doctors sent to aid San Diablo. But the plan to bring American doctors into the country was opposed by the Executioner[4], leader of the Communist-oriented left-wing

1 Probably not from Saturn at all. The Stone Men are an *intergalactic* menace. Likely their home planet is also ringed, and their telepathy was interpreted incorrectly.

2 The name of this Latin American country is a very bad joke. Someone will someday pay for it.

3 In this story, Ms. Foster was unaccountably called Jane *Nelson* and pictured with *blonde* hair. A mistake?

4 No relation to the Asgardian god of the same name.



1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Illustration by Tom Bilinsky

forces. He ordered an air strike on the vessel carrying the Americans, and thus made Don Blake's decision for him: Thor would go public. Blake was more than a little upset with the Executioner's tactics, and determined to break the back of the leftist army.

The civil war, of course, came to an abrupt end, and it was not long before the need for medical aid disappeared as well. So, after a time, Don and Jane returned to New York, where Blake began his career as a super-hero. There are *no* stories told from these early weeks of Thor's career; the Thunder God whisking crooks to jail simply was not very interesting. And during this period, Thor was simply Don Blake with super powers.

With the appearance of his evil half-brother, Loki, Thor's memories began to roll back with the force of a flood. He was no longer simply a mortal with the *attributes* of a god; *he was the god himself!* Armed with the memories as well as the power of Thor, the God of Thunder defeated the God of Mischief and sent him back to Asgard.

Loki was upset. Thor had managed to spoil his escapade on Midgard, while Odin had forbade his return to Asgard. Frustrated, the God of Mischief watched his brother secretly over the next few weeks and witnessed the entire affair documented in JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY No. 87. In this way Loki discovered Thor's secret, and determined to trap Thor forever in the body of Blake[5]. His failure to do so led to his subsequent defeat and embarrassment. For Loki, the fun and games were over—the next time would be for keeps.

The story documented in JIM No. 89 was the story of Thug Thatcher and Ruby, the girl who loved him. Witnessing the depth of the girl's love caused Don Blake to realize how much he truly cared for Jane Foster. Thor feared that Jane would reject Don Blake, and so sued Odin for permission to reveal his real identity to the girl. Odin refused, knowing full well that Jane loved Blake and not the God of Thunder.

Loki struck again. Actively seeking Thor's death, but fearing Odin's wrath, Loki needed an agent to do the deed. He found his agent in Sandu, a mortal with mental abilities Loki could multiply a thousandfold. It was nearly enough. Thor's physical prowess only barely matched Sandu's mental skills, and Sandu was defeated only after he burned out his abilities trying to lift Thor's hammer with telekinesis.

Blake's next adventure took him to India, where he had spent some time in the '50's studying with a Professor Shecktor. He came, as he had done in San Diablo, in response to a medical emergency—caused this time by the incursion of a Red Chinese unit into Indian territory. As Thor, he sent the Chinese packing across the nortnern border, earning the enmity of Mao Tse-Tung in the process. Barely a week after Blake returned to the States, Chen Lu, the Radio-Active Man, arrived to defeat Thor and gain Mao's revenge. He failed and was returned, special delivery, to the Chinese highlands.

5 In this incident, Thor saved five scientists who had been kidnapped by the Commies—it occupied most of the month's time because he had to make his way out of the country as Blake, with the scientists, on foot, to protect his secret identity.

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Illustration by David Ross

Thor wanted Jane badly, and the weeks he spent alone in India only furthered his resolve to press Odin harder for permission to marry the girl. But Odin was no less adamant in his refusal. Seizing the moment, Loki again caused Thor annoyance, this time with a more physical menace: the Lava Man, whom he had released from his subterranean domain some time before. The Lava Man was never a *real* threat to Thor, but Loki hoped that the Thunder God, in his frustration over Jane, would become careless.

Blake threw in the towel when Jane, thinking that Don was too *cowardly* to speak his mind, gave up on him and left. There was nothing he could do about it. Even if Jane was only trying to make him jealous, it did not matter—Odin had forbidden it. He fled to India again to lose himself practising medicine there, only to discover that Professor Shecktor was dying from a snake bite and that the menace of the Human Cobra had been unleashed on the world. Blake made a 180 degree turn and followed the Cobra back to the States. As Thor faced down the Cobra, Odin smiled upon his son, and Jane learned that the man for whom she had left Don was more of a coward than Blake would ever be.

Apparently, Odin had come to the conclusion that Thor's affection for the mortal was arguably real, for when Thor next was refused, and actually *raised his hammer* against Odin, the All-Father took pity and granted Thor the hope that Jane might yet be made an immortal if she were to prove herself worthy. But the hope did not last long. In a foolish effort to protect Don Blake, whom she thought a prisoner, Jane hid Thor's hammer and allowed the notorious Mr. Hyde to escape. This was Thor's first failure to capture a villain and Odin was furious with Jane. He would hear no explanations.

In desperation, Odin turned to the craftiest of gods for advice—and whatever his shortcomings, Loki had always been clever. To Loki, the solution was obvious: since the mortal wench had no other redeeming qualities, it followed that the attraction was purely *physical* in nature. If the goal was to get Thor to give the girl up, then all that was necessary was to find someone lustier and bustier than Jane. Who better than the Enchantress? Odin concurred, and the sorceress was sent to Earth to seduce the thunder god. She failed, of course, and was spurned as she had never been spurned by *any* man. Totally angered, she promised the Executioner certain favors in return for vengeance on the mortal woman who had caused her humiliation, knowing full well that Thor would defend her. A full-scale battle between the gods resulted, and in the end Don Blake was closer to Jane than he had ever been before.

Odin was furious. He went to Earth to take command of the problem himself, leaving Loki in charge of Asgard. Odin knew that the temptation of authority might prove too much for his younger son, but the risk was necessary if he was to confront Thor in person. It *did* prove too much. Loki released Surtur, the fire demon, from his prison at the Earth's molten core and freed Skagg, the storm giant, as well. Fortunately, Heimdall overheard Loki's incantations and sent Balder to give warning. Separated from

1975 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Illustration by Glenn McEvoy

the source of his power, Odin was strained to defeat Skagg, and it was Thor, wielding Odin's sword, who dispatched the fire demon. So it came to pass that father and son reached an unspoken agreement to let the Jane Foster matter rest for a while. As punishment, Loki was sentenced to dwell on the Isle of Silence, serving the trolls.

And so the stage was set for the coming of the Avengers.

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The Lava Man	13pp.
Journey into Mystery No. 98	
Challenged by the Human Cobra	13pp.
Journey into Mystery No. 99	
The Mysterious Mister Hyde	13pp.
Journey into Mystery No. 100	
The Master Plan of Mister Hyde	13pp.
Journey into Mystery No. 103	
The Enchantress and the Executioner	13pp.
Journey into Mystery No. 104	
Giants Walk the Earth	13pp.

Issues 86, 90, 92, 94-96, 101, and 102 contain stories that are in some way inconsistent with this continuity. However, Odin's decree that Thor not reveal his identity can be found in No. 90.

Chapter I generated the most correspondence between Dick O'Malley and myself. Here was a fan seriously advocating the elimination of nearly a third of all the early Thor stories; most remarkable! Let me excerpt the relevant portions of some of his correspondence, specifically those containing his reasons.

"Believe me, I don't take this lightly. The way it came about was this:

"1] No.'s 86 and 101-102 were tossed out with great pangs of regret because I love Zarrko. But every appearance of the Tomorrow Man has caused continuity problems. In JIM No. 86 we have Thor surviving a nuclear explosion; we have an open-air test of a cobalt device, which is useful as a weapon only because it's so grossly dirty, and so would never be tested above ground; we have Zarrko showing up to steal a prototype [why not a later device?]; and we have Thor conveniently chipping off a piece of 23rd-century metal, even though his hammer passes through, so he can follow Zarrko through time [?!]. In JIM No. 101-102, we have the Avengers appearing - but Loki wasn't sentenced to serve the Trolls until No. 104; further, Iron Man is in his red armor, indicating that this happened after AVENGERS No. 2, but if that were true, then Jane Foster's trip to limbo in JIM No. 103 would have freed the Space Phantom, and we have it on good authority that this happened in JIM No. 109. In MARVEL TEAM-UP No. 9-11, we find Kang in the 23rd century in direct violation of "Roy's Theory of Relativity," and we also find Quicksilver amongst the Avengers at a time he wasn't even speaking to them. Finally, the sequence in the recent Thor issues for all intents

and purposes never happened, since it was erased from time. So it's with reluctance that I set the Tomorrow Man saga off to the side as a separate reality.

"2] No. 90 brought a huge ARRGH from me way back in 1963, the first time I saw it. There's no doubt in my mind that this one never happened. It was just a rehash of the Skrull plot from FANTASTIC FOUR No. 2, complete with the identical solution.

"3] No. 95 is highly questionable. Don Blake has never before or since displayed ability in robotics. The idea of a duplicating machine also stretches credibility, particularly when it creates conveniently evil duplicates for Thor to fight. It makes things better to ignore it.

"4] No. 94 gets tossed because it's impossible. There's no such "chromosomatic gland" that will turn you evil if it gets smacked. The story was obviously done because Stan Lee asked himself, "Gee, what if Thor and Loki were to team up?" He had to find a way to do it.

"5] No. 92 was a little bit tricky. The whole story hinged on the fact that Loki was bound with Uru chains. Yet - why would he be bound so? Certainly the chains didn't hinder him in any way. Lo and behold, when No. 97 came out, Loki was free without explanation. Obviously, then, he hadn't been chained after all, and No. 92 had never happened.

"6] Finally, No. 96. This bit with Merlin would have been easy to ignore up until X-MEN No. 30. At that point Roy Thomas used the villain again, even though he obviously wasn't the real Merlin. Up until HULK No. 210-211, I was willing to accept JIM No. 96 as at least partially accurate; but then, in an effort to tie loose ends together, Len Wein made it easier to throw everything out. Mongu the gladiator never existed; he was part of the illusory world created by Dakimh the Enchanter to test the Man-Thing and Jennifer Kale. Tying the Maha Yogi in with Bloodstone doesn't make sense, because the magicks flowing through one gem [and providing life] wouldn't also be flowing through another piece. This last is debatable, though, and I might feel inclined to include No. 96 as 'real' if the Maha Yogi were to appear still once more.

"Throwing out these stories had an unforeseen side effect: the character of Loki changed radically. Instead of a malevolent fiend despised by all, he shows up as a mischievous god, driven by jealousy of his brother. The menaces he sent against Thor were more nuisance than real threat—not even Sandu had a real chance of beating Thor [unless the Thunder God made a mistake]. Indeed, one can believe that Odin would turn to the crafty Loki for advice in No. 103, and even go so far as to risk leaving the wily one in charge in No. 104.

"In short, throwing out these eight issues makes for a tighter, more believable continuity, and that's why I did it."

The next chapter of Continuity Conundrums deals with the Hulk. Dick had this to say by way of introduction:

"This synopsis of the Hulk continuity is entirely conjecture through the first six paragraphs. I've heard somewhere that Len Wein is working on a story to explain why the Marvel Universe astronauts didn't gain Fantastic Four-like powers; I always figured it was because there was no way to tell when a cosmic storm would hit, and I hope it doesn't conflict because I use that supposition in this chapter. Also, since the gamma rays derived from atomic decomposition are not known to induce green skin, I've postulated that Banner's gamma rays are not the same. This supposition seems to be borne out by gamma radiation's connection to cosmic radiation most every time the subject has come up in the Marvel Universe. Indeed, I've presumed that gamma rays were derived from cosmic rays, which makes sense considering the similarity of the results.

"Everything else in the chapter follows directly from the stories themselves."

CHAPTER II: THE COMING OF THE HULK

Cosmic radiation and gamma rays. In the Marvel Universe, both of these will either give you super-powers (the so-called "cubing" effect) or kill you. The only difference is that gamma rays cause you to turn green, if you survive. Cosmic radiation was first encountered in August of 1961, in the creation of the Fantastic Four. Since that time, instruments designed specifically for the purpose have detected cosmic radiation storms at least six times, the most recent (and most powerful of them all) occurring in January of 1976, coinciding with a massive outbreak of solar flares (see X-MEN No. 101).

The search for the source of this still mysterious radiation led Reed Richards to the discovery of the equally mysterious Negative Zone (see CAPTAIN MARVEL No. 21). Analysis of that zone, however, has apparently led Richards to the conclusion that the source of cosmic radiation is something else.

But even though the source has not yet been found, the possible military applications of cosmic radiation have never been lost on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is likely that very early in the fall of 1961, the nuclear genius, Dr. Robert Bruce Banner, was commissioned to head a secret project. Purpose: to analyse and duplicate the effects of cosmic radiation.

Dr. Banner had very little data from which to work. He doubtless received as much information as Dr. Richards was willing to provide, but that probably was not very substantial considering how close-mouthed Richards has always been about his work. In addition he doubtless received what recordings the few U.S. satellites orbiting above the Van Allen belt at that time were able to transmit. The data were so sparse that Banner felt he would accomplish more by working alone on theory and analysis, leaving only the actual structural work (if and when) to his fellow workers. This also had the advantage of keeping secrecy foolproof: only Banner and a few high-ranking officials knew what the goal of Banner's project really was, and only Banner knew of the route he was taking to get to that goal.

Banner was able to isolate distinctive effects in the cosmic radiation. Probably in analogy with nuclear radiation, he called them the alpha, beta, and *gamma* effects, the nomenclature actually *designed* to create confusion (there might have been more than three effects—would you believe delta rays?). It looked as if the third effect would be the easiest to duplicate, analysis of the first two leading to theoretical dead ends; and so it came to pass that by May of 1962, in the southwestern desert of the United States, there stood the most awesome weapon ever created by man: the incredible Gamma Bomb.

Only Banner knew that the bomb itself was a *means* to an end, and not an end in itself (the cost of building such a bomb was undoubtedly enormous, and the energy source itself unstable. Nuclear fusion devices have proven more practical. After all, how much power do you *need* to destroy the world?). This Gamma Bomb, as far as Banner was concerned, would be a one-time affair, showmanship to impress his funding agency and keep the money flowing. If the bomb should work, Banner already had plans for a smaller, more controllable source of the rays.

But then the unforeseen happened. As the count-down entered its final phase, Banner saw a teenager (Rick Jones) drive out in the open, far too close to ground zero to have a prayer of survival. Banner ordered the countdown delayed and went out after the youngster, but the order was never transmitted to the techno whose finger hit the firing button, and, for better or for worse, the Incredible Hulk was born.

The story describing the birth of the Hulk, and his subsequent encounter with the deformed Russian scientist called the Gargoyle, can be found in the pages of INCREDIBLE HULK No. 1 (May, 1962). The Hulk was *gray* in that first issue—presumably because the gamma effect had not yet fully set in—but was green in all his subsequent appearances.

The Hulk was then far weaker than the rampaging invulnerable titan of today's Marvel Universe. He could be shot (and *was*, in HULK No. 1); he wasn't powerful enough to leap vast distances; he couldn't even batter his way through ten feet of rock. For the most part, the Hulk wanted to be alone. Hunted by the Army, he would retreat to the marshlands near the base and spend his nights as the monster. Actually this suited Banner, whose only concern was to find a way to free himself of this nightly curse. With the collapse of the project, Banner was free to spend his days in the laboratory he'd built inside a natural cavern beneath a New Mexico lake. There he worked, with the assistance of Rick Jones, who displayed a remarkable intuitive ability (see also CAPTAIN MARVEL No. 42) that proved invaluable, on two goals: 1) to build a prison strong enough to contain the Hulk and 2) to piece together a machine that would utilize gamma radiation to eliminate the Hulk. The work had to proceed rapidly, for there was no way to tell when the Hulk would leave the swamp.

Then, as shown in HULK No. 2, the verdant monster was discovered in his hiding place. The battle with the Toad Men followed, which may or may not have actually occurred (it was a fun story, but didn't make much sense). In any case, Banner knew the jig was up, and rushed to jury-rig a locking mechanism for the half-completed prison. Fortunately (for Rick, at least), the lock held.

Things would change. In the month between the stories in the first and third issues, "Thunderbolt" Ross, who was at the time the chief of Western defense operations, had come up with a plan that would eliminate two problems at once. The Hulk was one, of course; the other was a new booster rocket capable of achieving such enormous acceleration

that NASA feared no animal would be able to survive it long enough to give any adequate readings. The solution was obvious: launch the rocket in New Mexico and put the Hulk inside, letting the brute do some good before he died. The problem was that Ross had no way of getting the Hulk there; he knew that the Jones boy had a connection with the Hulk (though he was not sure just what it was), and tricked him into luring the Hulk into the rocket. Rick did not know there was never any intention of bringing the Hulk back, but he would find it out later.

As a result, Bruce Banner flew directly into the middle of the cosmic storm of June, 1962. The radiation affected his gamma-radiated body, turning him *permanently* into the Hulk (as Ben Grimm had become the Thing) and increasing his power geometrically. In addition, when Rick sabotaged the controls of the ship upon learning the truth, the sundered telemetry connections from ship to ground caused a feed-back. Rick discovered that so long as he remained conscious he could impose his will on the Hulk.

This story, and the subsequent encounter with the Ringmaster's Circus of Crime, were told in the pages of HULK No. 3 (Sept., 1962).

Rick was exhausting himself trying to remain awake, but there was nothing else to do. Every time he dozed off, he risked the possibility of the Hulk going on a rampage. There was no chance Banner's prison could hold the monster now, because it had only barely held before and the brute was far stronger than he had been. The problem resolved itself when Rick was picked up by the military police (he had ruined the space shot, remember?). Seeing nothing else to do for it, he ordered the Hulk to escape, and, praying that the green goliath would not do too much damage, finally got some rest.

The bounding Hulk made his way outside the range of Rick's control, and wound up as far west as Los Angeles. He rambled around out there, then amazingly meandered East again, returning to Rick's zone of control. Rick, thinking more clearly after having gotten a good night's sleep, had decided that the situation was untenable. Eventually, the Hulk was going to break something. The only solution was to risk killing them both in an effort to save Dr. Banner by using his still uncompleted gamma ray device.

Rick was rescued by the Hulk, and the Hulk was ordered to proceed to Banner's secret cave. As seen in HULK No. 4, Rick's intuitive ability worked—almost. The Hulk was destroyed, but Banner was left an invalid, barely able to support his own weight.

For the proud Robert Bruce Banner, this situation was even more hopeless than the previous one. In the days and weeks that followed, Banner remained in seclusion, trying to find a way to become the Hulk again, but this time to shield his *mind* from the effects. Eventually, it worked. The mental link with Rick was severed and a more subdued Hulk walked the face of the Earth.

The original Mongu the gladiator, who was actually Boris Monguski, a Soviet agent wearing an exoskeleton, was startled to find this Hulk. This was not the mindless monster he had been led to believe he could capture easily and bring behind the Iron Curtain to analyse. This was a thinking, rational being, and Banner-Hulk sent Monguski and his assistants packing.

But Rick saw what Banner-Hulk could not. Even with Banner's mind, the Hulk was savage and menacing. Each time Banner became the Hulk, he was less and less in control, as if there was a build-up of gamma radiation leaking through to affect the part of Banner which should have been shielded. Worse, the Hulk's bad P.R. was still in force. Officially the green guy was still a menace, and the constant hounding of the military was bringing the Hulk's violent nature to the forefront.

The Hulk became progressively less restrained in the two stories in HULK No. 5 (Jan., 1963). In the first, he encountered the menace of Tyrannus, the black magician who had been banished by Merlin to the Earth's core in centuries gone. Tyrannus had survived beneath the Earth, but it was not until 1962 that he found a way to circumvent Merlin's spells and return to the surface. The efforts of nearly 1500 years came to naught when Tyrannus ran up against the Hulk. The monster destroyed Tyrannus's portal to the surface, and the magician was trapped once again until the Mole Man inadvertently freed him in 1966. In the second story, the Hulk fought the hordes of General Fang in the Tibetan principality of Lihasa.

Rick was more than a little bit concerned, and probably made an effort to convince Banner not to become the Hulk unless absolutely necessary. In fact, there is no evidence of Banner becoming the Hulk again until early in 1963, in the pages of FANTASTIC FOUR No. 12. A series of incidents of destruction occurred at the base, and General Ross at first naturally assumed that the Hulk was responsible. Ross finally gave up; various traps had failed dismally to catch the brute, and he seemed to have developed a certain cleverness, since no one had actually seen him do the damage. The Fantastic Four were called in and found that the Hulk had not been guilty at all (not surprisingly). The villain was actually Karl Kort, the Wrecker (no relation to the later villain, familiar to readers of THE DEFENDERS as the founder of The Wrecking Crew), who had been paid by the Reds, and who was using the Hulk as a convenient cover.

The Hulk had been very quiet for a few months. Indeed, in retrospect it became apparent that the Hulk had done some good deeds (e.g. against the Ringmaster and against Mongu the gladiator). When the Hulk defeated the menace of the Metal Master, as shown in HULK No. 6 (March, 1963), the President (JFK himself!) granted the monster a full and complete pardon.

It was the calm before the storm. Banner had very nearly lost control of the monster during that adventure. There were moments, even during daylight, when Banner could feel the Hulk trying to burst loose. Bruce suppressed them at first, but it was more and more a losing battle. Once again he had to lock himself up at night against the possibility he might lose control. He felt he might become the Hulk even without using his machine.

It finally happened early in the summer of 1963. Early one morning, Banner simply became the Hulk and effortlessly burst out of his cage. He attacked a squadron of Ross's soldiers, and the hunt was on again. The subsequent events are only now being related in the pages of the black and white magazine, THE RAMPAGING HULK. Bruce Banner would never again be completely in control of the Hulk's awesome power without the intervention of an outside source.

The next chapter to be covered is Ant-Man. Dick O'Malley has this commentary:

"I'd planned to take this chapter right through the coming of Giant-Man, but it seemed that it would simply turn into nothing more than a series of plot summaries. I concentrated instead on retelling Hank Pym's origin story, tying loose ends together in a manner that makes it self-consistent. That's something I can't recall ever having done before. Even so, the last half of it comes off in the manner I'd hoped to avoid. Nothing I could do about it.

"The TOMB OF DARKNESS story was originally printed in STRANGE TALES No. 75 without any reference to handsome Hank. When it was reprinted, some clever soul made editorial changes, and now this story serves to explain where Pym picked up the robotics background displayed in building Ultron. And so I list it as appearing first—in TOMB OF DARKNESS No. 22, rather than in STRANGE TALES."

CHAPTER III: THE NARRATIVE OF HENRY PYM

The Ant-Man. A tiny titan bestriding a world of giants. An anomaly in a universe larger than life.

The Ant-Man was the exception that proved the rule. He was, at the same time, the least popular and yet the most well-loved of all the early Lee-Kirby creations. When the Wasp came along, the character of the strip changed radically—not for the better, nor for the worse. It was simply different.

Dr. Henry Pym was the Ant-Man, just as he later became Giant-Man, Goliath, and Yellowjacket. Today he has won acclaim as the most accomplished biochemist in the Marvel Universe, with diverse achievements in the fields of robotics and cybernetics as well. Though he lacks the intuitive technical genius of Anthony Stark, he is considered a capable engineer. And though he is hopelessly outclassed by the sheer brute power of the minds of Reed Richards and Victor von Doom, he must be ranked among the most brilliant men of his time.

It was not always thus. Through much of 1960, the young Henry Pym worked as a research assistant, prior to receiving his Ph. D., to the elvish Albert Poole. It was under Poole that Pym received basic training in the science of robotics. Amazingly enough, Pym was fired from this job because of incompetence (for the circumstances of this dismissal, see TOMB OF DARKNESS No. 22).

It was not long thereafter that Pym received his doctorate in biochemistry, indicating that he was about 25 at the time. Turning his attention to the twin fields of molecular cell transition and cell specialization, and in one of those rare flashes of insight that seems to occur at least once to every competent scientist in the Marvel Universe, he made the

theoretical breakthrough that ultimately led to the development of a molecular reduction formula. (He had worked on a growth formula with Poole, without any success).

A formula to shrink a person or object is, of course, impossible—or so it was believed—and accordingly his colleagues scoffed when presented with Pym's theory. Pym was undaunted, and spent the greater part of a year working in seclusion, trying to synthesize his brain child. In the time-honored tradition of the mad scientist, he tested it on himself. It worked! He was so excited, he forgot that the antidote, sitting on a ledge four feet above him, would be out of reach once he was reduced to the size of an ant. Pym wound up having a most curious adventure inside an ant hill located in his back yard, the experience leading him to the reluctant conclusion that his formula was too dangerous for public consumption. Frustrated, he set his work aside and began to socialize again, breaking his year-long stint as a hermit.

It was the spring of 1962, a time when even a young scientist's fancy will turn to thoughts of love. It was the *right* time, and wherever it was, it must have been the right place, because handsome Hank was soon married to Maria Trovaya, a beautiful Hungarian expatriate, who had left that country following the 1956 revolution. Together with her father, she had begun a new life in the United States.

Maria insisted on returning to Hungary for the honeymoon. She was certain that, after six years, and traveling as Mrs. Pym, she would be safe. She was wrong. Dead wrong. Her father died as well, blasted in an explosion at the factory where he worked in America.

It was too much for Dr. Pym to take. He went berserk with rage, and wound up muttering to himself in the solitude of an Hungarian prison. As he sat there, awaiting the intervention of the American consul, he nurtured an undying hatred of the Communists that would later manifest itself in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. He remembered both his formula and his adventure in the ant hill. He remembered Maria's last words to him; a quote from her father, chiding him for his laziness: "Go thou to the ants, thou sluggard." It was inevitable that the Ant-Man would be born. It was inevitable that Dr. Henry Pym would find a way to use the insect world against the forces of evil.

He worked single-mindedly upon his return to the States, intent on finding a way to communicate with the ants. Within weeks he had found his answer: the cybernetic helmet. He designed a costume, working from the published notes of Reed Richards pertaining to unstable molecules that would shrink and grow as did his body. He tried to induce his formula into a volatile state that would decompose rapidly on contact with air, so as to prevent analysis should he be captured or killed.

He was on the verge of completing the last step when circumstances compelled him to take the jump. In order to make a living, Pym had taken on a government commission to work with four other prominent scientists on a method to neutralize radiation leakage in case of a nuclear accident. Naturally, the Communists were interested. But their agents had been clumsy. Caught by surprise, they panicked and took three of Pym's colleagues prisoner. To Pym, it seemed like providence. He became the Ant-Man and rescued his friends (taking pains to let no one see him in his diminutive state), striking his first blow against evil.

Very shortly thereafter, Hank licked the problem with his formula and developed his reduction and enlarging *gases*, which were carried in separate containers at his waist. It was then (sometime in mid-summer of 1962) that the Ant-Man went public, preceding Thor and following the Fantastic Four.

He was a sensation in the New York press. Where the FF made good copy, the Ant-Man made great photos. And he was cute and adorable, too. He became an instant celebrity.

The possible military applications—possible only if this was not the Ant-Man's normal size—were not lost on the Kremlin. They deemed it so vital to know whether or not the Ant-Man could shrink and grow that they dispatched their *top* agent, a woman code-named Comrade X, to find out. Pym's delight at the woman's failure, and subsequent capture, must have been enormous. Not only had the Commies not found out anything, they had also lost the services of their finest operative.

The Ant-Man's interest was always primarily in preventing and avenging crime, though he was also always willing to take on any evil he could find. The first costumed villain Pym faced was Gerald Marsh, the Protector, who victimized various jewelers in the New York area. The Protector was notable because he was the first person in the Marvel Universe to utilize an exo-skeleton. Countless others would follow in his footsteps.

By late autumn, the Ant-Man had become something more than a nuisance

Illustration by David Ross / John Kricfalusi

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to organized crime. Since ordinary methods had failed, the crime lords determined to try the scientific approach, and recruited the Egghead for the job. Egghead was to become the closest thing to an arch-foe that Pym has ever had. Egghead was a brilliant, if erratic, man. His colossal ego had led him to attempt to sell classified information to the highest bidder, and he had covered his tracks well enough that the government was unable to prosecute (though he was summarily dismissed from his job as an atomic researcher). Egghead determined to turn the ants against their master, but this plan was foredoomed to failure because ants are neither very intelligent nor very emotional. They simply did not mind doing what the Ant-Man wanted them to do!

A strange and ludicrous adventure centered about the Ant-Man's inability to communicate effectively with the non-social insects. A radiation-induced mutation in a common, everyday beetle gave the insect not only intelligence but also the ability to command other insect forms. The Ant-Man was capable of overriding the Beetle (who had turned red in color) only with the ants. During the course of the war, the Scarlet Beetle stole Ant-Man's belt cannisters and used the antidote to the reducing gas to make himself man-sized (a very strange occurrence, and something that had hitherto seemed impossible). In the end, with the aid of his loyal ants, the Ant-Man overpowered the Beetle, and somehow robbed him of his intelligence.

Pym continued to pick up research grants from the goverment to support himself. One such grant involved the development of a gas mask composed of unstable molecules for the use of the Army. Apparently the mask proved too unstable, or perhaps too expensive to produce, since it has never come into common use. Pym utilized the mask to defeat the Hijacker, an elderly villain named Howard Mitchell, who had been defrauding his insurance company. The Hijacker would return fifteen years later to battle Black Goliath and the Thing—not a small feat for someone in his late sixties.

An Ant-Man adventure of dubious authenticity involved a trip to another dimension. This story was related in TALES TO ASTONISH No. 41.

The ultimate power. Jason Cragg had it for a time, and squandered it, as so many others have done. Cragg was possessed of a voice that carried utter conviction—all who heard it believed what it said. Pym would later describe it as a voice with the Ant-Man, and, as a result, his power was lost (seemingly) forever.

The Ant-Man would face one more foe alone. By this time it was winter, and with the coming of the cold came *age*, in the form of Elias Weems. It was he who first developed the theories of age induction in living organisms. It was fortunate for the world that Weems was basically a good-hearted soul. Later, probably after Weems's death, his theories would be recovered by a group known as the Organization. The destruction of this group was chronicled in CAPTAIN MARVEL No.10.

It was a matter of weeks until the coming of the Wasp.

The Wasp, Henry Pym's stunning sidekick and eventual wife, first appeared in TALES TO ASTONISH No. 44. Far from being "just another supporting character," the Wasp is Henry Pym's complement, *a flighty socialite but also a staunch ally in times of need. Dick O'Malley's fourth chapter continues the story of Henry Pym, irrevocably changed by his meeting with Janet Van Dyne.*

CHAPTER IV: THE COMING OF THE WASP

Ant-Man and the Wasp.
Giant-Man and the Wasp.
Goliath and the Wasp.
Yellowjacket and the Wasp.

Quick! Think about it, and tell me what each of these terms has in common. Wrong! Not just the Wasp, but also Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne, the faces behind the masks. (Gotta be careful about obvious answers, friends!)

For almost a decade and a half, they have been at each other's side. They have been each other's friend, confidant, lover, and spouse. They have fought each other's foes and befriended each other's friends. They are *incomplete* without each other, and together they have a certain *strength* that is impossible to define accurately.

It began long ago, in the winter of 1963—if you can remember that far back—at a time when Koufax was still an erratic fireballer, when the Beatles had yet to displace the Four Seasons, when Peter Parker was still a whimp, and when America still had faith in the world of Science yet to come....

Two men of science met that January—a meeting that would have amounted to nothing but for the simple fact that Vernon Van Dyne accompanied by his daughter, Janet, traveled to meet Dr. Henry Pym.

From the very first, Hank and Janet were smitten with each other. Hank felt a reaction he had felt from only one woman before, but Janet Van Dyne was only 18 years old—hardly more than a child. For her part, Miss Van Dyne felt it too, but argued with herself against it, feeling she would prefer a person with a more active life than a biochemist's. Since Pym wasn't interested in Van Dyne's work in the slightest, they parted. Not for long.

Vernon Van Dyne's experiments utilized gamma radiation in an effort to pierce the fabric of space, thus leading hopefully to a method of instantaneous communication between Earth and other planets harboring intelligent life, paralelling Reed Richards's later work which led to the discovery of the Negative Zone. Within weeks of his meeting with Henry Pym, Van Dyne succeeded. Perhaps he had succeeded (as he thought) in contacting another galaxy, or perhaps he had succeeded simply in breaking through into sub-space—it did not matter in either case, because Van Dyne died as a result, leaving sparse notes and unleashing the menace of the Creature from Kosmos on Earth.

Jan grew up very quickly. The bored, flightly shell she wore dropped away, leaving a woman determined to avenge her father's death. But how? Her first thought was to turn to Henry Pym for help. Not the police—*Henry Pym*! And she had no idea at the time that Dr. Pym was also the Ant-Man. One can only imagine what might have happened had she been more rational—as it was, the lives of Henry Pym and Janet Van Dyne became bound together forever. With the implantation of specialized cells for wings and antennae, Janet Van Dyne became the wonderful Wasp. The world (as they say) would never be the same.

The Ant-Man took on only one more case by himself. He left the Wasp behind when he was contacted by the Fantastic Four a few days after defeating the Kosmos creature. If the *Fantastic Four* needed help, then it was certainly something he did not want an inexperienced Janet Van Dyne to face. He would never hesitate again, but as it turned out, Hank was probably right, because before the incident was over he would come face-to-face for the first time with Doctor Doom. There would be lesser menaces against whom the Wasp could go through her baptism of fire.

In the months that followed, the Ant-Man and the Wasp began to terrorize the criminal element. Between them and the newly-arrived Spider-Man, it must have seemed that the bug world had turned on the gutter element. Two such gutter people, crooks called Twister and Ape, were driven into hiding in the Bowery, where they discovered the man called Egghead still moping about his defeat so long ago. Upon hearing that the Ant-Man had taken a partner, Egghead devised a plan. He would be the first to try to capture the Wasp in order to lure Ant-Man into a trap. He would also be the first to learn that such an idea was *bound* to fail. The Wasp was no helpless damsel in distress—it was against Egghead that she first found her sting.

Jan had begun to work on Hank, to bring him out of the shell his research had created about him. She nagged him into dates. On one of these excursions, they came across a trumpet player named Trago. Remember that name, because he will be back; but for now, Trago is simply another in a long line of crooks. The Ant-Man and the Wasp simply stopped him from heisting the receipts from his performance that night.

Hank needed more friends. The only person he ever associated with socially was Jan herself, and even *that* was with reluctance—he seemed to do it only because *she* wanted him to. For Dr. Pym, the coming of the Avengers in the summer of '63 was probably the best thing that could have happened. It was Hank himself who suggested the team, and Jan was quick to jump on the bandwagon, giving the Avengers their name. Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne were the true founders of the Avengers.

THE ORIGINAL HANK PYM SOLOS

Tomb of Darkness No. 22 I Created Grutan	5pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 27 The Man in the Anthill	7pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 35 Return of the Ant-Man	13pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 36 The Challenge of Comrade X	13pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 37 Trapped by the Protector	13pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 38 Betrayed by the Ants	10pp.
* *Tales to Astonish* No. 39 The Vengeance of the Scarlet Beetle	10pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 40 The Day That Ant-Man Failed	11pp.
* *Tales to Astonish* No. 41 Prisoner of the Slave World	10pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 42 The Voice of Doom	13pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 43 The Mad Master of Time	13pp.

*Story of dubious authenticity.

Illustration by David Ross

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In the meantime, the man called Trago (remember him?) had gone to India, land of Enchantment. There he met the fakir, Ghazandi, and became his disciple. He returned to America months after he had left, armed with the power to control men with music. This was a power comparable to (though less specific than) Jason Cragg's, and again it took the Ant-Man, screened from the music's effects by his cybernetic helmet, to halt the reign of terror before it could truly get underway.

But ant size seemed to be more of a handicap than an advantage. As the Ant-Man, Hank lacked the sheer brute power of his new partners, Thor, Iron Man, and the Hulk—any one of whom could have squashed him in a second. Nothing brought this home as much as his fight with the Porcupine, during which Hank, deprived of helmet and antidote gas, was trapped in a bathtub. He escaped with Jan's help, of course, but for Hank that predicament was the last straw—never again would he be trapped in so insulting a manner.

The birth of Giant-Man was at hand.

THIS CHAPTER COVERS STORIES CONTAINED IN:

Tales to Astonish No. 44	
The Creature from Kosmos	18pp.
Fantastic Four No. 16	
The Micro-World of Dr. Doom	22pp.
Fantastic Four No. 17	
Defeated by Doctor Doom!	22pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 45	
The Terrible Traps of Egghead	13pp.
* *Tales to Astonish* No. 46	
When Cyclops Walks the Earth	13pp.
Avengers No. 1	
The Coming of the Avengers	22pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 47	
Music to Scream By	13pp.
Tales to Astonish No. 48	
The Porcupine	13pp.

*This story of dubious accuracy.

The last Avenger to be considered is, of course, Iron Man, the last of them to become a superhero. As in the Thor chapter, many of the early Iron Man episodes are regarded as "unreal"; Dick O'Malley had this to say about them:

"If you list the stories, then simply list all of them without comment. I think that any reader with a modicum of intelligence will be able to discern without too much trouble which ones I think 'really' happened and which ones are strange."

Despite his request, a few short remarks are in order. TALES OF SUSPENSE No. 40 is largely silly, but does have some grains of truth to it, most notably in the description of Stark's invention of and attempts to sell his motorized "roller skates", which became an integral portion of his armor. TALES OF SUSPENSE No. 42 describes a trivial attempt by the Communists to infiltrate Stark Industries. TALES OF SUSPENSE No. 43 probably happened, since Kala later took part in a massive three-way underworld war with Tyrannus and the Mole Man, but events in No. 43 were probably distorted. TALES OF SUSPENSE No. 44 is most likely a fable.

CHAPTER V: THE ORIGINAL IRON MAN

The young Anthony Stark was a man on top of his world. He had *everything*. He lived a free-wheeling life, filled with women, excitement, and adventure. He was the fifth richest man in New York, holding a majority interest in Stark Industries, the company founded by his late father. And in the final analysis he had his brain—he was the finest techni-

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Illustration by David Ross

cian and the finest engineer in the world.

In March of 1963, Tony Stark would gain one thing more: a heart condition that would plague him, off and on, for the rest of his life.

Date it. March of 1963, like any other time, can be understood only in the context of human events. It was the peak period of man's faith in technology. It was the height of the Cold War. Tony Stark was the ultimate cold warrior—the scientist-technician, young, with faith in the rightness of America. He went to Vietnam certain that his weapons could bring an early end to the decades-long conflict that had torn the land apart. He left carrying a grim lesson: only *men* can win a war—it took many years for that truth to sink in.

The irony was obvious. Here was Tony Stark, the man who hoped single-handedly to end the conflict, stumbling across the simplest of booby-traps: a trip-wire connected to a handful of grenades. The resulting explosion killed Stark's companions and left shrapnel imbedded deep in Tony's chest, too close for the surgeon working for his captor to risk removing. Stark would die, Wong Chu was told, for in a matter of days the shrapnel would work its way into the heart, severing muscle and nerve, rendering the organ incapable of beating regularly.

Now Wong Chu was a wily leader of the Viet Cong. He determined that Stark should not be told the full truth—he had recognized the civilian—and that Stark should be given the false promise of his life in exchange for his miniaturization technology. But Stark, too, knew men. He realized that if it were possible to do so, he would have been *already* saved, his secrets to be torn from him when time allowed. He agreed to Wong Chu's proposal, offering to build the mightiest weapon imaginable—but never promising to deliver it to his captors.

To aid him in his work, he received Prof. Yinsen, a physicist thought dead by the Western world. Together, working from photo-designs originally developed by Stark himself, the two men raced against time to piece together a mighty, invincible, electronic body. It would house a pacemaker to keep Stark's heart going. It would house innumerable offensive and defensive weapons. It would turn the man who wore it into a one-man army, capable of defeating entire platoons of men.

But, as the body was being charged, Wong Chu intruded. Yinsen provided the vital seconds necessary, and was shot for his distraction, leaving Tony Stark to carry out vengeance and to destroy Wong Chu utterly. Prof. Yinsen died so that Iron Man might live.

Wearing the dull, grey suit of armor, Stark returned to the States and to his laboratories. There he performed modificatons on the suit, incorporating devices he had been unable to get hold of from the Vietcong (because they did not have them), and concentrating power units into the chestplate. Once these modifications were done, Stark could doff the limbs and headpiece, needing only the chest device to keep his heart going. But *that* he had to wear almost constantly—to remove it for more than a few minutes at a time would lead to heart flutter and ultimately death.

Originally, Stark had intended to put these suits to military use. But the sheer ease with which he had completely destroyed Wong Chu's installation caused him to reconsider. There was too much power here for him to risk entrusting it to any other man. Stark decided to keep it in his own hands, but also to use it to *help* others. He would become a super-hero.

It was not long afterwards that the Iron Man made the scene, causing a great deal of confusion. Even though he was obviously a good guy—capturing crooks and spies and at least one mad scientist with a shrinking ray that looked suspiciously like Dr. Doom's (from FANTASTIC FOUR No. 10)—Iron Man's dull, robot-like appearance tended to make people nervous. By the end of April, and at the suggestion of a woman who might have been Marianne Rogers, Iron Man's armor had been gilded, and the Golden Avenger became a synonym for the Iron Man.

Tony *tried* to continue living as he had been, but eventually he found that he could not. His chest plate kept him from getting any closer to a woman than conversation. His other life as Iron Man would demand more and more of his time, and his enemies would begin to multiply like bunny rabbits.

The first such foe was Dr. Strange, the Master of Menace (not to be confused with Marvel's Master of the Mystic Arts). Strange was the first to realize that Iron Man's armor must use ultra-frequency waves to control the various relays and switches. He overrode Stark's mental control (as later the Mad Thinker, Modok, and others would do) and used Iron Man to free himself from prison, Tony watching helplessly from within his metal shell.

Within three weeks, Strange had worked himself into a position from which he could blackmail the world—threatening to explode every nuclear device from the safety of his impregnable fortress (Hydra, under the direction of Baron Strucker, would later make the same threat—was Strange connected?). Iron Man dug underneath Strange's force field and kamikazied Strange's equipment, but was saved by the intervention of Strange's sweet young daughter, Carla, who was good where her father was power mad. Strange, however, escaped—which begs the question: *What could he be preparing that would occupy him for 14 years if he could blackmail the world after three weeks?*

The next important day in Tony Stark's life was Memorial Day, 1963. He drove in the Indianapolis 500 that year, in a car he had designed himself—the Stark Special. During the excitement of the day, Tony made a mistake he would never make again (one way or another)—he forgot to recharge his chest device! It gave out on him halfway through the race, and he was immediately seized with pain. Tony lost control of the racer, crashed, and was pinned in the wreckage. He would have burned to death when the fuel caught fire, but he was saved by an ex-boxer named "Happy" Hogan. Hogan would become Tony's chauffeur, and later head of security at the Long Island plant of SI.

A few days later, Iron Man did something he had hoped to avoid as long as possible: he made an appearance at Stark Industries, in this instance to stop one Gregory Shapanka (aka Jack Frost, Blizzard) from lifting several important documents. Stark was aware that such

ncidents would become increasingly common, and that simply to claim Iron Man as a friend would not explain why the Golden Avenger always happened to be around whenever Stark was around. An ingenious explanation occurred to him, and he began to leak rumors that Iron Man drew a salary (even superheroes have to eat) as Tony Stark's bodyguard, and that Tony Stark was the genius who had designed the armor n the *first* place. The beauty of this explanation was that it was so close to the complete truth that very few people—even to this day—have ever questioned it. And Stark handled the rumor-mongering so well that the explanation became public knowledge long before it was either confirmed or denied.

It was Shapanka himself, weeks later, who, as Jack Frost, confirmed the "truth" of the reports. Seeking revenge on Stark, JF made his way to the industrialist's offices, where he found Iron Man waiting for him instead. After defeating the villain, Iron Man "admitted" that he worked for Stark.

It was about this time that the group that would become SHIELD was beginning large-scale operations. Perhaps as early as July of 1963, and with the approval of President Kennedy, Tony Stark was appointed to be the director of weapons research for the fledgling organization. If this is true, then it would explain why the Soviet Union (who, lacking *complete* information on SHIELD but knowing of its affiliations with NATO, naturally assumed it was being set up against *them*) suddenly decided to discredit Stark.

This operation was handled by Professor Vanko, the original Crimson Dynamo, but at the root of it was Nikita Khrushchev himself. The plan was to strike selectively at SI-designed and SI-built equipment, specifically the electronics of defense weaponry. If done correctly, Stark himself would come under suspicion. The plan very nearly succeeded. A select committee chaired by one Senator Byrd (!) began investigations after a few weeks, but Iron Man nipped off the threat. He convinced Vanko (after defeating him) that Khrushchev was planning to have him killed upon his return to Russia, and so Vanko defected, clearing Stark's name.

Late in the summer of '63, Iron Man teamed up with Ant-Man and the Wasp to battle the Incredible Hulk (Thor was also there, but he vanished mysteriously before the battle began). During the course of the fight, Iron Man actually took on the green gargantuan hand-to-hand, proving that he could hold his own versus the mightiest man-creature on the face of the Earth. The battle ended when Thor returned, his half-brother Loki in tow. The God of Mischief confessed that he had arranged the Hulk's apparent rampage, hoping to lure the Thunder God into battle against this most physical of menaces. When the Ant-Man suggested that they team up permanently, Stark went for the idea with a full head of steam. He donated his mid-town mansion as a headquarters (he had been spending most of his time at the Long Island plant anyway). He underwrote the expenses of the group. Between SHIELD and the Avengers, both of Stark's indentities now had a definite purpose for existing.

But not long after the Avengers were formed, disaster struck again. Just as the interest in investigating Stark was dying down, a series of "accidents" occurred. Equipment built by SI was *melting* under stress and falling apart in use. Byrd's committee cranked itself up again—lightning striking twice in the same place....

These "accidents" were done at the hand (or chest) of Bruno Horgan, the Melter, who was once a competitor of Stark's. Horgan had been driven out of business by SI, and when he hit upon a method of rendering iron allotropic, he decided to use it to return the favor. Unfortunately for Horgan, he hit SI's Long Island plant to soon. He was defeated by an *aluminum*-clad Iron Man, and forced to flee for his freedom. Stark was cleared, for there were witnesses to the Melter's power, and the investigations again ground to a halt.

One of the things that must have led to the Iron Man's crimson-and-gold armor was the fact that the Hulk and Thor, at the first meetings of the Avengers, were continutally on the verge of coming to blows with each other. Iron Man had held his own against the Hulk, but the battle did not last long—Stark must have wondered what would have happened had he run out of power—and it was becoming increasingly apparent that another fight might come about some day.

The idea crystallized when the sheer weight of the golden armor contributed to Iron Man's inability to cope with the voodoo of Mr. Doll. In a day and a night, incorporating ideas he had been working on for SHIELD, Stark developed an optimal suit of armor, balancing weaponry and bulk, making an efficient mix of power and speed. To signify the *new* nature of the Iron Man, this second suit was tinted in stylish crimson, with just enough gold to let him keep the nickname (Crimson Avenger already having been used, you see...).

Time would prove Stark correct in assuming that increased maneuverability would more than compensate his loss in sheer invulnerability. □

And there you have it!

Comments and correspondence on the issues raised in this article are welcomed; interested fans may reach the author at the following address:

Dick O'Malley
c / o Dennis Mallonee
4085 Nobel Drive No. 3
San Diego, California 92122 U.S.A.

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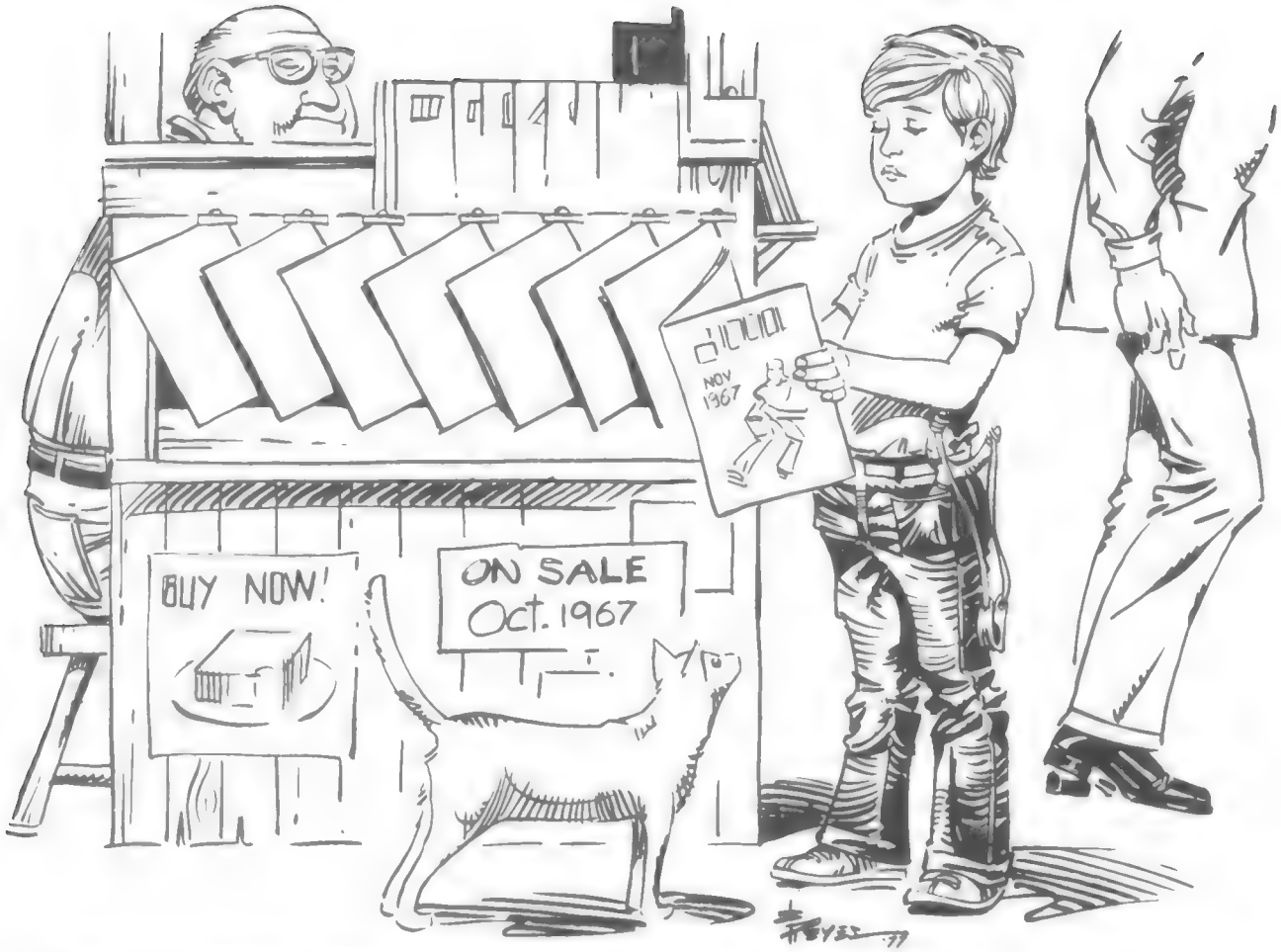

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BRAINSTORMS

Memories, Fandom and The Future Part one.

By Joseph D. Krolik

If one were to ask why bizarre things happen to me more often than to the next fellow, I would be at a loss for an answer. Perhaps it is my fate. I often envision the Lord looking down, pointing a finger at my neonate form and invoking an oath.

So here I sit, on my bed at two A.M., unable to sleep. I must put some thoughts down on paper. Readers will note that this is my second Brainstorm, and from my descriptions of eleventh hour deadlines will conclude that a) the brainstorms are few and far between, and b) they usually occur at odd times. Be that as it may, we could equally accurately title this column "Joe Thinks One Up Again."

Let me address myself to the topic of fandom in general and whether it will survive in its present form. As background, I will provide some fan history in the guise of digression and reminiscence.

My first exposure to comic books was at an early age. It feels as if I have been reading comics since before I could talk—or at least appreciating the pictures. I owe this to my brother, who was always gifted with a large pile of comic books. He would pacify my hungry imagination by providing it with food in the form of stacks of current and not-so-current issues. This was back in the fifties, and I wish I still had some of those old comics today.

The initial fascination with the medium waned during 1957-1959, probably because I was occupied with new endeavors like school. (My 20-year career in school ended this spring with my graduation as a Pharmacist.) But towards the end of 1959 I became interested in comic books once again, only this time more as an offshoot of my interest in Science Fiction. I had discovered the world of SF through several juvenile novels, and comics stimulated my imagination further because they provided pictures to go along with the ideas.

I can easily remember visiting a friend's house two blocks away and spending many afternoons rummaging through stacks of comics. Like many fans who eventually graduated to the Marvel line of comics, my initial impressions were formed by Superman and all his related characters. He remains my personal favorite to this day.

Purely by chance, my early involvement with comics closely paralleled the development of comic fandom itself. It was then that Jerry Bails conducted the first effort at producing a fan magazine, while a loosely-knit assemblage of people were becoming aware of one another through the letter columns of Julius Schwartz's books. I started to collect in earnest in 1962, when Jerry Bails began the first Alley Awards Poll.

At the same time that (unbeknownst to me) the comics movement was forming, Science Fiction fandom was coming out from the obscurity of the 1950's. Many SF fans of that era had begun to see their work published professionally. The World Science Fiction Convention was a well-established institution, albeit attracting only a modest following each year. New SF magazines made their debuts and old ones revitalized themselves with fresh outpourings of talent. For a kid of ten years like myself, it was a time of wonderment.

Collecting was fun in 1962 and 1963 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Our neighborhood was blessed with an abundance of drug stores, some eight within a two-mile radius of home. I had to gauge when a

new issue would appear by watching the deliveries; there was no *Comic Reader* as we know it today.

Canadian News Company has been our local distributor since the Dawn of Man. In those days, there would be a delivery on Tuesday and another on Thursday. The former would comprise regular issues, while the latter would include giants and annuals when the appropriate time of the year came around. At that time there were fewer titles to collect, and bliss of all blisses, they didn't cost much.

Many of my fond remembrances of collecting in that period I owe to my parents. Unlike most stereotypical parents—those wont to throw out stacks of comics, put down comics as trash and otherwise do all they can to lead their children into orthodox "intellectual" pursuits—my folks were liberal and foresighted. I can remember a day in May, 1963, when I was sick in bed. *Batman No. 155* and *World's Finest No. 133* were due out that day, so I asked my mother to go to the drugstore to get them for me. She did: Just one example of how my parents allowed me to pursue things which interested me and from which I gained enjoyment.

I was fanatical about preserving my books. Special drawers in my desk were set aside, into which each issue was carefully filed by title and number. Often the necessity of maintaining continuity would send me to several stores looking for certain issues. *Green Lantern* was always scarcely distributed then; only one store regularly stocked copies.

I was also lucky in that my folks would more often than not give in to my need for money. New fans wonder how someone could run short when comics cost only 12 cents, but I used to get 35 cents per week allowance! Murray Ward, my colleague, used to get even less.

This was the golden period for characters like Superman, Flash, Batman, Atom, and Green Lantern. We now look back on issues of books containing those characters (like *Justice League of America*) from that time period and comment on how *classic* they are. Though not the initial rebirth of the super-hero age, it was certainly the blossoming of its most productive period.

All at once, with the arrival of Marvel Comics, relevance entered the picture and fandom began to nuture itself in earnest. My first experience with Marvels came from being forced to read some: A friend from whom I wanted to purchase some DC's agreed to the sale only if I would take a bunch of Marvel comics and read them through. My initial apprehension turned to avid interest, and I was soon eagerly awaiting each month's new supply of titles. In those days there were only about ten titles, and they all appeared on one day in Winnipeg. We called it "Marvel Day."

So, as my infant collection grew and prospered, fandom continued to develop without my knowledge. It was nevertheless inevitable that sooner or later we two would meet. The first meeting occurred when I met Ken Mitchell. Ken is a local fellow who has been associated with the dealing aspect of comic fandom since its early days. I remember the first time I was ushered into his comics room. My eyes literally jumped out of my head when confronted with thousands and thousands of back issues from the 1940's and 1930's. Keep in mind that this was well before our inflation had even been hinted at. Occasionally when I get nostalgic I look back at some of the old price lists from those days. You could get ALL THOSE BOOKS for a mere pittance!

I began to get deeper into fandom following that meeting. Harold's Magazine Store (the namesake and proprietor of which is now deceased), which I habitually frequented, was located downtown on Princess Street near the hub of the textile district. Harold would always have a batch of back issues on hand. Every time I was in the store and saw someone looking through the comics, I would ask if he / she were a collector. One day I met a guy named Juris Smolinskis. He mentioned that his collection wasn't all that big, but that he was meeting a friend shortly who owned thousands of comics.

That friend turned out to be Andris Taskans. Andris lived clear across town from me and had a collection which was magnificent. From that early meeting we soon became fast friends. Andris and I were both interested in contacting other fans. We got a group together and formed the Science Fiction Fans and Comic Collectors of Winnipeg, or SFFACCOW for short. (What kind of a cow??). We got a bit of free publicity in the press and met Calvin Slobodian as a result. Cal was at the time a teacher at a north-end high school. He helped our club produce its own fanzine, patterned after a magazine he showed us: the *Rocket's Blast / ComiCollector*. True comics fandom had arrived.

And so it went. In the winter my father would take me out on Saturday afternoons on a drive to all the bookstores in town. I remember one day in 1966 in particular, when we stopped at a certain local store owned by a gentleman we now call the Mad Russian. This guy had a wall lined with boxes of old comics, but would never bring them down because he hated to watch someone pick through them looking for "certain issues". This day I persuaded him to bring some books down. Seven dollars later I happily left the store with my dad, carrying a three foot stack of back issues. Those were days when you could pick up gems for 5 cents each in mint condition. And the things I got: All 1950's Science Fiction comics and super-hero stuff. It was glorious!

Fandom was a wonderful infant child in those days. Yet even as my own interests in the comic medium were maturing and diversifying, so comic fandom was coming of age, entering a new era of price-consciousness.

Comic books, because of their subject matter, have always been regarded as a second-class form of literature. Hundreds of articles have pounded this fact into our heads over the years. Because of this, many who continued to read comics into their adult years used to have to disguise their activity. This made it doubly difficult to get together with other fans. While it has always been true that the bulk of comics are sold to younger readers, it is through the efforts of mature readers that the fan movement has been fostered.

It took a long time for collectors to become aware of each other. Most early communication between fans was by

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mail. Eventually, small fan publications sprouted, and several pioneers made significant inroads by having their names publicized in letter columns. It was an exponential growth thereafter.

As fans became more aware of one another, a loose network of "dealers" grew up. I use the quotation marks because at that time the dealing was secondary to the appreciation of the art form. Some dealers started selling comics as an adjunct of Science Fiction dealing (like Claude Held, an old list of whose has all the key first issues at $3.00 each!). Others arose by digging around for back issues for themselves and selling the duplicates they came across in the process. It wasn't a business back then.

Small conventions began to spring up. The emphasis was placed on fan interaction, enjoyment, and education of new fans to appreciate the background on which the comics medium had to that time been based.

But through this gradual diversification of interests, fandom began digging itself into a rut, one which it still occupies to this day.

In every hobby there are those who are exploited and those who are the exploiters. Perhaps "exploit" is too harsh a word to use, but wherever money shows itself, those who would take advantage of its presence are usually not very far behind.

(Let me make it clear that I have no disdain for any faction of our hobby. I am illustrating my viewpoint so that you, the reader, will have a better understanding of why comics fandom is where it is today. I believe wholeheartedly in each person enjoying his hobby in his own way.)

With the advent of early dealing, early fan publications, adzines, conventions, a pattern was set for a quick maturation. The period from 1968-1973 is looked upon by me as being the focal point of fandom's change of face. During this period the various comic book companies set into fairly predictable patterns of production, with no great *lasting* innovations brought forth. While the industry stagnated, the fan movement continued to gain momentum based on its own past achievements. With the increased interest among new fans for back issues, their desirability grew. The laws of supply and demand took over and a slow trend towards rising costs became apparent.

During the last three years of the sixties, a shift in emphasis took place among fans. They were now interested in securing the older issues not for their *artistic* or *nostalgic* values, but for their *monetary* value. All this would have been all right *if* people had been able to keep these two opposing outlooks in balance, but they weren't. Fandom split into two factions.

Fanzines continued to proliferate and the conventions continued to grow in size and number, with the emphasis changing in favor of the "curiosity" and "investment potential" of the hobby. On the one hand we had the purists, who continued to enjoy comics for the sake of their art and imaginative treatment of themes, and the other we saw an ever-increasing horde of professional dealers amass ever-larger hoards of comics for sale. The rare issues became rarer, the legions of fans became larger, and to many neo-fans (to borrow a term from SF fandom) the importance of collecting soon became not *what* the Fantastic Four were doing in issue No. 1 but rather to accumulate the funds necessary to buy the darn thing in the first place. And we continue to foster this attitude towards collecting even more today.

I've got to say it again: I'm not a hypocrite. You may know that I myself have been a dealer since 1968, and you may say that I'm contradicting myself when I state that it isn't possible to be both a dealer and a collector and still retain the original fascination with the hobby. You will say that "everyone" has his / her price and that no dealer's collection could long remain intact under the siege of monetary temptation. To forever quell your protestations, let me say that I place myself in a category totally removed from either the sphere of collecting *or* dealing. I shall try to remain an objective observer looking in from outside, tempering my opinions with some healthy scepticism.

To add to the gloom I've been spreading, we must also note that during the period of industry stagnation we had to face the fact that fandom as an entity had not enough force, *despite* its apparent organization, to appreciably affect the material produced by the comics companies. In this context we can mention the patterned production styles of the companies, the fleeting gems in a sea of mundane "formula" books, the price hikes, the failure of the industry to overcome its distribution problems and its ignorance of fan talent.

What was even worse was that the talent which *did* come into the limelight during the stagnant period began to be valued not for its own sake but for its investment potential. The *Green Lantern / Green Arrow* issues by O'Neil and Adams are classic examples. We saw not only the bastardization of the medium's creativity for the sake of monetary return, but the birth of a whole new movement which survives to this day as what I call "Art Fandom". Art fandom is a group which pounces on anything which could be considered "visually outstanding" and creates a cult around it. I'm a cynic at heart) I *know* that there *is* a dedicated faction of fandom out there which enjoys art for art's sake, but I can't help thinking of the tremendous motivation of financial gain which surrounds art cultism of this kind.

Comics fandom had indeed nurtured its own degradation. It had become a gloomy place where legions of screaming youngsters flocked to conventions, awed by the showbiz glitter of the whole idea, molded into a mindless stream of ruthless junior tycoons by the ever-present appeal of money. Gone were the subtle enjoyments which comics provided, the sense of wonder which our childhood imaginations so eagerly thrived upon.

My next column will analyze the course of comics fandom over the past four years and its relationhsip with other fandoms. It will set forth alternatives for our future as an organized entity and suggest ways we can achieve our goals. If the latter half of my article depressed you, take heart and be here next issue. We'd sunk pretty low, but we were working our way back up. □

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WARDWORLD

WITH A KANG, NOT A WHIMPER

Murray R. Ward

The basis of the famous Marvel Comics continuity is the fact that in the Marvel Universe every thing, person or event sooner or later has some relation to or effect upon another thing, person, or event. As Monty Python would put it, it is a society for "putting things on top of other things."

As a result, trying to describe the whole Marvel megilla for the first time to someone totally unfamiliar with it can be an unbelievable hassle. A simple question can lead to an hour-long discussion of interminable minutiae. Take for example the question, "Who is Storm?" Not only does the answerer have to explain mutants in general and the X-Men in particular, he must make sure there is no confusion between the character in question and Susan *Storm* Richards or Johnny *Storm*, the Human Torch. Johnny in turn is not to be confused with the other Human Torch who appears in the Invaders and who is now the Vision in Avengers, or with that other Johnny with flaming powers, Johnny Blaze, a.k.a. the Ghost Rider. And so on. And that is just one simple example.

Those of us who hold the continuous Marvel Universe sacred and who can recite volumes of Marvel trivia at the drop of an Uru hammer are constantly on the lookout for new unexplored tie-ins between the various strips and characters. Long-standing mistakes like Dr. Doom's bilocational time machine, or the Inhumans' portable Great Refuge, or the misuse of the term "Negative Zone", drive us nuts and send us scurrying to our collections in search of possible explanations. One of the greatest and most central mysterious connections in the Marvel Universe is that between the various identities of the man who, for purposes of simplicity, we shall call Kang the Conqueror. While pondering this multi-faceted puzzle, it occurred to me that Kang could serve as the pivotal connecting factor or focal point tying the entire Marvel Universe together! Here's how it works:

First we must bear in mind that Kang has five separate identities in which to work his machinations, a number to which he is limited by the statement of his final identity, Immortus, in *Giant-Size Avengers No. 3*. These are Kang, Immortus, Pharoah Rama-Tut, the Scarlet Centurion, and a fifth yet-to-be-disclosed self whom many feel must be Dr. Doom. Working on the assumption that it is indeed Doom who is Kang's fifth persona (as first hypothesized by Doom and Rama-Tut when they met in *Fantastic Four Annual No. 2*), we may proceed to my theory.

What makes Marvel-Earth different from our own Earth? Basically, it is the presence of super-powered heroes and villains. Without them, Marvel-Earth would be identical with Counter-Earth, that world created by the High Evolutionary where no super-beings (save the now-departed Warlock and Man-Beast) exist. And what accounts for the presence of these super-beings on Marvel-Earth? In almost every case, their presence may be traced directly or indirectly to the interference of the many-faced time-traveller known as Kang.

Many of these beings, notably those who are not earthlings in origin, would still exist without Kang's interference, but they would not have visited or taken up residence upon Earth and thus would not have the effect of turning an ordinary planet (i.e., our own) into the crucible of continual cataclysmic conflict that is Marvel-Earth.

Referring back to *Fantastic Four Annual No. 2*, we see a young Reed Richards offering to share a college dorm room with Victor Von Doom. Von Doom (Kang) refuses the offer in his usual arrogant fashion and Reed ends up bunking with Ben Grimm. Thus Doom / Kang is responsible for the first meeting of Reed and Ben, a meeting that eventually led to the near-fatal space-flight that birthed the Fantastic Four. The FF in turn are responsible for myriad other characters, e.g. their unearthing of Kree Sentry No. 459 causes first Ronan the Accuser and then Captain Marvel to come to Earth, which in turn leads to the events of the Kree-Skrull War.

In *Giant-Size Avengers No. 2* we learn that Kang is responsible for the creation of what may be the first vampire, and thus is responsible for Dracula and all his subjects. In *Avengers Annual No. 2* his activities as the Scarlet Centurion cause the creation of what Roy Thomas would term a What If? world where the original team of Avengers still meets. In *Avengers No. 10*, as Immortus, he pulls both Merlin and Hercules, important pivotal characters in the Marvel Universe, out of their normal continua to fight the assemblers, thereby causing who-knows-what strange consequences.

It is also my theory that Kang's repeated time-voyages to the era of the 1960-70's have caused a weakening of time-space forces, opening the gateways between Earth and other-dimensional worlds such as Olympus, Asgard, the Dark Dimension of Dormammu, and the worlds reachable thru the various mystic nexi such as Man-Thing's swamp. So we have Thor and the Norse pantheon, to name the most obvious examples, walking the modern-day Earth. Furthermore, since the energy dispersed from these dimensional barriers / gateways has to go somewhere, it is dissipated in a stream or aura of radiation around the Earth which attracts the attention of interstellar visitors: Galactus, for example. Why else would the planet-destroyer select Earth as his target when he could as easily have obliterated the (relatively) nearby Skrull home planet in Andromeda? The Earth is not the Watcher's favorite planet just because Robert A. Heinlein wrote a song about its "Green Hills", y'know.

There may be super-characters and events that are not explainable by this theory, but for the most part they are trivial exceptions. They may only be manifestations of Kang's tampering that we do not yet know enough to explain. Time travel always has powerful effects on the fabric of reality, and 95% of all time travellers in the Marvel Universe use machines based on Dr. Doom's original model from *Fantastic Four No. 5*, which was, of course, invented by...who, him again?...Kang! Lee and Kirby, step aside for the *real* creator of the Marvel universe: Kang the Conqueror! □

pertwillaby papers

EPISODE 12: LAST TIME WE LEFT LANCE, HE WAS HEADED FOR THE CULINARY CAPITAL OF THE CAMPUS, THE CAFETERIA...
THIS CERTAINLY SMELLS LIKE THE RIGHT PLACE TO FILL ONE'S ALIMENTARY TRACT ... BUT HOW WILL I MANAGE TO DINE SANS "MEAL-BOOK". HMMMMM...
!!-WHO DO THESE DAMN HEAD RESIDENTS THINK THEY ARE ANYHOW??
AWRIGHT—LE'S HAVE YA' MEAL-BOOK!
I WOULD GLADLY SUPPLY IT UPON REQUEST, MY ODIOUS LITTLE HARRIDAN, BUT I HAVE BEEN AS BUSY AS YOU ARE UNCOMELY... & HAVE NOT YET OBTAINED IT..
OKAY♫♪ JUST THIS ONCE (SIGH) WELL MAKE AN EXCEPTION...♪♫ FOR YOU ♫
GUEST TICKETS ALL YOU CAN EAT $11.98
NEXT WEEK: ENTER FEATHER OF LUFFNUTHIN!

EPISODE 13: AS YOU RECALL, LAST WEEK WE LEFT LANCE IN THE CAFETERIA...
WELL, NOW TO MINGLE WITH THE COLLEGE COMMONALTY. I WONDER IF I'LL ACHIEVE IMMEDIATE PEER APPROVAL.
OH, THERE'S A NICE TABLE ... AND WHAT A PAIR OF SHAKERS!....
ER.. MAY I JOIN YOU?
WHY, SURE...
MY NAME IS LANCE PERTWILLABY.
HI..... I'M FEATHER FLUFFNUTHIN.
TO BE (VA-VA-VOOM) CONTINUED...

EPISODE 14: LANCE HAS JUST MET FEATHER FLUFFNUTHIN...
A SINCERE PLEASURE MAKING YOUR ACQUAINTENCE MISS FLUFFNUTHIN... THIS CAMPUS CERTAINLY IMPRESSES ME.
I'M GLAD... I'M IMPRESSED, TOO!
WELL... BE THAT AS IT MAY...
OH, WHAT TIME IS IT?—I'VE JUST GOT TO GET TO THE HEALTH SERVICE WANNA' COME?
IT WOULD BE SHEER & ABSOLUTE RAPTURE...
NOW WHERE DID I PUT MY SPECIMEN...
NEXT EPISODE: ENTER: VIKTOR DIMITRIUS SMYTE!

EPISODE 15: AS YOU RECALL, LANCE HAS JUST AGREED TO ESCORT FEATHER TO THE HEALTH SERVICE...
BE SEEING YOU LATER LANCEY... GOTTA' GO NOW.
ADIEU & FAREWELL.
HM... GUESS IT'S ABOUT TIME I CHOSE THE VOCATION FOR WHICH I SHALL ASPIRE.
—MAMMALIAN NERVE SURGERY —☆ SUPPOSE THAT'S AS GOOD AS ANYTHING ELSE.
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOLOGICAL & NEUROHUMORAL SUR...
KLASS! LET ME INTRODUCE MINE-SELF; I AM PROFESSOR VIKTOR DIMITRIUS SMYTE!
TO BE CONTINUED!!

EPISODE 16; LAST TIME, LANCE HAD DECIDED TO SIT IN ON HIS FIRST CLASS — CONDUCTED BY NONE OTHER THAN VIKTOR DIMITRIUS SMYTE!!—

THOUGHT YOU WERE IN SECTION #2

NO SUCH LUCK... THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I'VE HAD **V.D.** THIS YEAR.

?

ACHTUNG, KLASS... VE VILL NOW VEHDY CAREFULLY TRACE THE KOURSE OF THE TENTH KRANIAL NERVE FROM ITS ORIGIN TO ITS TERMINUS.

ZIP!

V-2

LEAPIN' LUFTVAFFEN! EH. VUN OF MY LEKTURES FROM DER OLDT DAYS

SLAP!!

ZOWP!

HEH, HEH... TIME CERTAINLY FLIES, MINE KINDER...

I SURE KOULN'T GET DAT KLINKER TO...

TOMORROW!: VIKTOR & LANCELOT CLASH!!

EPISODE 17; AS YOU REMEMBER, LANCE HAS "CRASHED" A LECTURE BY PROFESSOR VIKTOR D. SMYTE....

PROFESSOR SMYTE, I CAN BARELY READ YOUR HANDWRITING

EH, YES, I VAS GOING TO BE A MEDICAL DOCTER.

PROFESSOR SMYTE, SIR, I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SPINAL ACCESSORY WAS THE ELEVENTH, NOT THE SEVENTH, CRANIAL NERVE.

I DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOU — YOU VILL TELL ME YOUR NAME.

SCREET!

LANCELOT PERTWILLABY, SIR.

YOU VILL REPORT TO MINE LAB — SCHNELL!

RRIING!

NEXT WEEK: THE THIRD DEGREE!

EPISODE 18; AS YOU RECALL, DR. SMYTE HAS JUST "INVITED" LANCE TO HIS LAB... SCHNELL! —

ZO, YOU ARE LANCE PERTVILLABY... VHERE DID YOU SAY YOU LIVED... PORLOCK HALL?

YES... IS YOUR HOMETOWN FAR FROM HERE, PROFESSOR?

UH... UH... WH-.. YES, CERTAINLY! I VAS BORN IN COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, THE HEARTLAND OF AMERIKA!?!

SEE, SEE, MY PAPERS! ... I AM AS AMERIKAN AS APPLE STROODLE!!! ... I LOVE POTATO SALAD, KOKA KOLA UND JOHN VAYNE!!!

..WHAT'S THIS ABOUT "AUCHWITZ" .... THE "S.S."?...

HOOWP!

WRONG PAPERS...

ZIP!

TO BE CONTINUED!? (?)

EPISODE 19; YESTERDAY, AS YOU'LL RECALL, LANCE WAS IN THE OFFICE OF PROFESSOR VIKTOR D. SMYTE...

IT SHOULDT BE OBVIOUS TO YOU NOW THAT I AM A TRUE RED WHITE & ... UH... BLUE AMERIKAN?

I NEVER DOUBTED IT FOR A NANOSECOND, SIR

BESIDES, I VAS JUST TESTING DER KLASS MIT DAT LITTLE MISTAKE... AND YOU VERE THE ONLY ONE WHO NOTICED...

I REWARD YOU VITH THE HIGHEST HONOR— THE IRON CRO—ER.!.. A GOLD STAR! —— I'LL SEE YOU IN KLASS TOMORROW....

BLITZKREIG!?! THIS MAN COULD BE AN AGENT FROM NUREMBURG... I MUST TAKE ACTION... SOON...

SLAM

TO BE (SHUDDER) CONTINUED!!

EPISODE 20; LANCE HAS BEEN SITTING IN ON CLASSES AND OTHERWISE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF COLLEGE LIFE "TUITION FREE" FOR SOME 5 WEEKS NOW... BUT NOW WE JOIN HIS ROOMMATE, SCHYLER ROATCH III, BACK AT THE DORM.

CURSES — I THOUGHT MUMSY HAD ARRANGED FOR A SINGLE ROOM FOR ME. BESIDES, THIS PERTWILLABY CHARACTER STICKS IN MY CRAW!
HI SKY, OL' GUY!! SEE YOU'RE BACK FOR ANOTHER BIG YEAR!?
GOT A ROOMIE FOR A CHANGE I SEE... HEY, THERE'S SOMETHIN' AWFUL FAMILIAR 'BOUT THIS JUNK.
WAIT A MINUTE! THIS IS LANCE PERTWILLABY'S STUFF!
!?!? YOU KNOW THIS PERTWILLABY?

NEXT EPISODE: SCHYLER SUSPECTS...!

EPISODE 21; AS YOU RECALL, LANCES OLD FRIEND FREDDIE KEGG, HAS JUST DROPPED BY — & IS PROCEEDING TO INADVERTENTLY SPILL A FEW BEANS ABOUT LANCE TO SCHYLER ROATCH!

TELL ME ALL YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS PERTWILLABY.
HECK! I DIDN'T THINK LANCE EVEN HAD THE BREAD TO MAKE IT DOWN HERE...
OH, REALLY..?
ΔI TAPPA KEG
DOESN'T HAVE A CENT IN THE WORLD.. NO FAMILY EITHER — NO AUNTS, NO UNCLES — NO NUTHIN'!
HOW VERY INTERESTING..
PORLOCK HALL
THERE'S SOMETHING MORE TO THIS PERTWILLABY THAN MEETS THE EYE...

NEXT EPISODE: CONFRONTATION!

EPISODE 22; AS YOU RECALL, LAST TIME FREDDIE KEGG HAD INNOCENTLY TOLD SCHYLER OF LANCES APPARENT LACK OF BOTH OPULENCE & CONSANGUINITY...

AS OF YET, NONE OF MY TEACHERS HAVE SUSPECTED MY UNENROLLED STATE; PERHAPS MY LITTLE SCHEME WILL WORK AFTER ALL.
HALL
OH LANCE, A FRIEND OF YOURS CALLED ON YOU... SAID HIS NAME WAS FREDDIE KEGG.
HE WAS SURPRISED TO SEE YOU HERE, LANCE.. MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR LACK OF FUNDS.
OH-WELL.. EH.. HE OBVIOUSLY DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THE TRUST FUND I'M RECIEVING FROM A WEALTHY AUNT UP EAST!!
A WEALTHY AUNT, EH???

TO BE CONTINUED!

EPISODE 23; AS YOU RECALL, SCHYLER HAS JUST SEEN THROUGH LANCE'S ATTEMPT TO PLACATE HIS CURIOSITY.

AH, YES... THE BENEVOLENCE OF MY DEAR AUNT... OH, TIME FOR SOME NOURISHMENT — SEE YOU LATER SCHYLER —
SOOOO... PERTWILLABY ISN'T QUITE WHAT HE SEEMS TO BE, AFTER ALL..
APPLIED NASTINESS
ANY HANKY-PANKY ON HIS PART WOULD MAKE EXTRUSION FROM MY ROOM — MUCH LESS, THE UNIVERSITY — A SIMPLE MATTER.
OH, TIME FOR DINNER WITH MY ILLUSTRIOUS FRIEND & COLLEAGUE, PROFESSOR VIKTOR DIMITRIUS SMYTE!!

DOM-DA-DUM DUM...

EPISODE 24; LAST TIME, AS YOU REMEMBER, SCHYLER WAS PREPARING TO DINE WITH HIS GOOD FRIEND PROFESSOR VIKTOR D SMYTE...

WHAT WILL COME OF THIS UNHOLY ALLIANCE? (CONTINUED) TO BE CONTINUED!

EPISODE 25; AS YOU RECALL, LAST TIME WE LEFT SCHYLER & PROF SMYTE IN THE BEERGÄRTEN PLOTTING AGAINST OUR HERO LANCE!

A SEARCH THRU DER FILES OF OUR DEAR COLLEGE PRESIDENT ADRIAN MORPHOUS SHOULD QUICKLY RESOLVE THIS! IF ITS TRUE, PERTWILLABY VILL BE EXPELLED — MACH SCHNELL!

COULD THIS BE THE END?! TUNE IN TOMORROW...!!!

EPISODE 26; AS YOU RECALL, PROF SMYTE IS ON HIS WAY TO COLLEGE PRESIDENT ADRIAN MORPHOUS' OFFICE TO EXPOSE OUR HERO LANCE— BUT LET US JUMP AHEAD TO DR MORPHOUS' OFFICE, WHERE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IS IN CONFERENCE.

I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU SAY THAT, HUBERT. AFTERNOON, GENTLEMEN —TO WORK!? TO WORK!? WE'VE GOT TO DECIDE WHETHER TO GIVE ACADEMIC LOANS TO THOSE RETURNING KOREAN WAR VETERANS!

TO BE CONTINUED.....

EPISODE 27; WE LEFT OFF AS COLLEGE PRESIDENT ADRIAN MORPHOUS WAS ADDRESSING THE TRUSTEES...

THERE ARE PRESSING MATTERS BEFORE US, GENTLEMEN— THE CONTRACTORS MUST KNOW BY MIDNIGHT WHETHER THE NEW GIRLS DORM WILL HAVE URINALS MIGHT BE CO-ED SOMEDAY.

OO-OO-OO—HOW CAN YOU WORRY ABOUT A SILLY THING LIKE THAT WITH THE MALT SHOPS INFESTED WITH JITTERBUGGING JUVENILE DELINQUENTS IN THEIR NOISY HOT-RODS.
A. MORPHOUS

IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL THE COMMIES WILL HAVE EVERY GIRL WEARING BOBBY SOX BELOW THE KNEES — AFTER ALL, THEY JUST STOLE OUR A-BOMB.

HOW CAN WE DEBATE A SILLY THING LIKE URINALS WHEN THE WORLD IS IN CRISIS — WHY, I'M EVEN NOTICING CHILDREN STARTING TO BACK-TALK THEIR ELDERS THESE DAYS!?

NEXT EPISODE: W.D SMYTE ARRIVES!